Tagati

Cynthia Stockley

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NOVELS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

VIRGINIA OF THE RHODESIANS
POPPY
THE CLAW
THE DREAM SHIP
WILD HONEY
APRIL FOLLY
PONJOLA
PERILOUS WOMEN
THREE FARMS
THE LEOPARD IN THE BUSH
TAGATI

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BY

CYNTHIA STOCKLEY

Author of "Poppy," "The Claw," "Ponjola," etc.

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TAGATI

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CHAPTER I

THERE had been a mishap up the line, and the through Buluwayo to Salisbury train was two hours late. Passengers for Bangwelo, a good-sized town in the midlands of Rhodesia, instead of reaching there in comfortable time for dinner, had mostly dined on the train. But three inmates of a first-class carriage, having been travelling continuously from the Cape, a matter of three days and nights, were sick of train meals and preferred to wait and see what God would send them at their unknown destination; they were sick, too, of looking at each other, or alternatively, out of the window, even had it not grown too dark to see any longer the veld as it was thereabouts, flat, sparsely bushed and singularly banal; this last was about the only thing the three would have been found to agree upon at that time.

Felicia Lissell had flung back her head and closed her eyes. Pagg read the weekly edition of the *Times* with a prim assiduousness, and the Countess opposite, knitting one of her endless jumpers that no one ever wore, considered them both, over the top of her tortoiseshell spectacles, with those once famous forget-me-not eyes, faded now, but still shrewd as a lynx's.

Pagg, her maid of many years' standing, was a sour and unappetising morsel, with little narrow subservient eyes that observed everything while assuming the servant's blank pretence of seeing nothing; thin-faced and lean-bodied she professed an unutterable scorn for men, but she could be

wonderfully arch when there was one about. She admitted fifty-seven summers, which must mostly have been winters, for her gaze had a permanent bleakness, and the sharp spinsterish nose remained at all seasons faintly pink-tipped.

Felicia's short nose, in fine contrast, was like a delicate ivory carving above the geranium of lips that lent an illusion of being freshly placed together for a kiss; the fringe of long black lashes over her dreaming eyes seemed to have been dipped in gold dust; the brows, stencilled archwise wide above, gave an expression of surprised and wistful innocence—the *priez pour moi* look it used to be called in Gaby Delys, but in Rejane, who also possessed it in her lovely youth, was known as the *fiche-moi le camp* look. In Felicia Lissell a tinge of haughtiness about it gave pause to those of a too "come-on-ish" disposition, causing them to count ten before proceeding to further investigation. No matter what the look is called, one thing is certain, those who possess it possess brains also, and penetration. Life may give them a few shocks, but so sound is their judgment that few people take them by surprise.

When Felicia was only ten she proclaimed this faculty in herself with a fair amount of accuracy. It happened that they were in Paris, and, hearing two friends of her father's discussing a play called *Lui,* then running at the Grand Guignol, she demanded to be taken to see it. When her father refused she protested plaintively but indignantly:

"But why not, Daddy? . . . I know practikally ev'thing."

She still knew practically everything, but she said less about it. In spite of this great asset, however, and a number of others patent to the naked eye, the Countess would often say in her dictatorial, I-am-the-great-Amen fashion, that Felicia's greatest charm lay in her exquisite unconcern of the effect she produced, and a serenity of manner only attained by good breeding combined with an experience of the world simply staggering in one so young. But this was a purely feminine point of view, and, by male computation,

abstract and secondary. What interested men in Felicia was the warm ivoriness of her, faintly flushed with rose; the grey, greeny-blue eyes mysterious as opals; the small proud head shaped as were Greek heads of old, the hair alive and unruly of nature but slicked by art to lie sleek as the blue-black sheen of a swallow's wing; that gracile body of hers, slender and vigorous as a young tree blossoming delicately in spring.

Pagg, rustling the *Times,* gave a suspicious glance at Miss Lissell and coughed in a genteel manner.

"I see, m'lady, that Her Majesty will spend the week-end with Lady Lingden at Massingham."

Felicia's lips quivered faintly. Well might Pagg have wished to insure herself against that ironical smile!

"Damn Massingham!" said m'lady, equably. "It was there I started my sciatica. They can say what they like, Pagg, but I'll never believe that that Anne Boleyn room wasn't damp."

"Yes, m'lady." Pagg pinched her lips together, expressing solicitous agreement, waited patiently for a minute or two, then took another dip into the only portion of the newspaper that held any interest for her. Greed, and her passion for royalty were the salient features of an unlovable character. Like so many capable servants she hailed from one of those Norfolk villages where the concentration of working-class girls upon an ambition to enter service at Sandringham makes for their extraordinary domestic efficiency. On the busiest of her days Pagg would still find time to study the Court and Society news, and might later be heard commenting to anyone who would listen:

"I see that the Queen has chosen Lady Mary Trefusis to be her new Lady-in-Waiting. . . ."

"I note that the Duchess of York is moving shortly to her new home. . . ."

"Lord Iveagh entertains the King at Elveden this week, I believe."

The Countess, who took the keenest relish in chronicling these remarks for her friends' delight, related that on the day of Princess Mary's marriage Pagg and she were staying alone at a little country cottage in Devonshire, and to every tradesman who came to the door Pagg made the same arch inquiry:

"Fine day for the wedding, isn't it? Going up to town for it?"

At about ten o'clock that night she startled her mistress by exclaiming solemnly:

"Well! It's all over now!"

"What's all over, Pagg?"

"With Princess Mary," gloomed the virgin maid.

To complete the narrative, some months later when the first rumours of an "expected happy event" were delicately mentioned in the "news of the World," Pagg, gazing at the picture of Viscount Lascelles, was heard to ejaculate with a satisfied air:

"Well, he's done *some*thing!"

Of course, as Felicia often said, a character like that always in your close vicinity *might* possibly add to the gaiety of your life, if she only had a sense of humour as well, or didn't mind your having one. But Pagg was not humorous and never merry and bright; only extremely refined, exclusive, and genteel. And with any reason to suppose that anyone was getting any fun out of her she could become both shirty and vindictive.

"It's a quarter to nine, m'lady, so we must be drawing near our destination," she now declared, respectfully officious.

"I should hope so, damme!" said the Countess, crankily. "Wake up, Shonnie, you ought to be getting ready."

But Shonnie (otherwise Felicia) had no intention of "waking up" until the train actually slowed into the station, and offered something more novel for consideration than the sterile visage of Pagg or the conversational eccentricities

of Countess Karamine. She was weary of the Countess Karamine. She always guessed she would be, but had been obliged to risk it for the sake of escaping from tiresome relatives to resume the nomadic life she adored. The death of her father, the famous traveller and explorer, Sir John Lissell, had robbed her of that chosen fate of wandering, and only with Letitia Karamine—a most provoking woman, but her godmother, sort of cousin, and indisputably *grande dame*—had she been allowed to escape again from England and the coils of convention. It was necessary to remember this when things went too badly.

"Old Letty is a pathological case if ever there was one and Pagg has a sex complex. Probably I shall be a mental case myself before the end of the voyage." Thus she had written to her friend, Kit Fentry, before the ship reached Madeira, and things had got a great deal worse after that, as may be gathered from what she set down in her diary on the eve of the ship's arrival at Cape Town.

"All childless married women over fifty ought to be shot. *Un*married old women are different. They have learnt to fill in those blanks of life with other loves and other interests. But a childless, married woman, especially when she has been beautiful and spoilt, retains and develops her selfish idiosyncrasies in a way no mother can. Mothers have to break up their individuality and divide it among their children to pass on to the race. But the barren women preserve theirs *intacto* and it often goes bad in them. When I hear cousin Letty squabbling with Pagg, bleating about the food, chronicling her aches and pains, or malignantly picking the passengers to pieces over the top of her tortoiseshell spectacles while she knits, I often wish she had died on the Siberian steppes. It is hard to remember at such times that epic story of her accompanying her Russian husband into exile, his death in her arms during the frightful journey; the long struggle back through terrible snows, hostile guards, wolves and failing horses; her grim determination to bring

the body to the tomb of his fathers, even, it is said, carrying it for long miles on her own back; and arriving in Moscow at last, the *blond cendre* hair gone snow-white, the frost of Siberian wastes in her eyes and in her soul. What a pity not to pass out when one has reached the highest pinnacle of one's life like that, with the glow of tragedy, self-sacrifice, glorious achievement still on one! Instead of living to become garrulous, trivial, tiresome, or, at best, a kindly gaga old thing! I hope it will never happen to me. I'd like to go out at the top-point of existence, tragic or ecstatic, while still young and gay, with the blood sparkling in my veins.

"Old Letty is still rather splendid-looking, with her frosty eyes, patrician nose, and the complexion it is her pride never to have touched with paint or powder. It's not difficult to reconstruct the dazzling creature she must have been when, with her celebrated diplomat husband, she went from Court to Court, fascinating all men, and putting the wind up all Ambassadresses, who hated her like poison and feared her like death. For, together with her matchless whiteness, unforgettable turquoise eyes, and champagne-bottle shoulders full of dimples, she possessed the tongue of an asp—and still does, alas!

"Oh, this voyage! With what sweet reasonable words did she beguile me to accompany her—not that I needed much beguiling, God knoweth! What charming reasons she gave for needing me, even after I'd made it clear that I wasn't going to be a second Pagg to her, nor a paid or unpaid secretary, nor treated like a pensioned governess, a poor relation or a penniless hanger-on. A Lissell, even with only two hundred p. a. isn't made of that sort of stuff, and in case she had any illusions I thought it better to clear the decks beforehand. I would, of course, I said, be as useful as I could, but was not going to be tied hand and foot and unable to call my soul my own. She had to swallow hard to get this down, being accustomed to laying down her own laws and tyrannizing over everyone in sight, but she *did* get

it down, and I had to realize then that she really wanted me, and asked her to tell me frankly why.

" 'My dear Shonnie, you are extremely modern; a thing I admire without being able to emulate.' This is far from being the case. With her alert mind, snow-white hair (shingled and permanently waved), beautiful jewels, and fashionable frocks, she's nothing if not up-to-date. However, I let that pass.

" 'One should be of one's time,' she continued in her best *grande dame,* I-have-lived-and-loved-in-greater-times-than-these manner. 'Then, your youth is a lure. I adore youth, and the only way for a poor old woman to keep it in her life is to have young people about her to attract their kind. Further, my dear, as you very well know, you are a very lovely creature and I also adore loveliness about me. Of your breeding I am certain. In spite of modernity and the unusual way you've been brought up, you are of the right stock—the stock that doesn't do the things that let "us" down and give the beastly Bolshies of the world a handle against us. Lastly, I want to see this new country with your eyes as well as my own, and there is no reason I know of why we shouldn't have a very amusing time.'

"How pleasant and flattering and clearcut it all sounded! Far too good to be true in fact, for cousin Letty could no more be simple and reasonable than a whale can take a ticket on a Union-Castle liner. Wherefore I think that over this period from Southampton to the Cape I had better draw a kindly veil. No doubt it is a charming voyage, especially when made for the first time. Even I, who know all about its marvellous silver nights under the Southern Cross, and its glittering days under the awnings, enjoyed it, as I enjoy everything. But not as did those happy mortals who hadn't a cousin Letty in tow.

"From the first night—when the whole ship's crew (first officer to baggage man) were bobbing in and out of her cabin trying to get at the 'master key' she had Yale-locked in her

dressing-case; when her bed had to be completely stripped of ship's blankets and linen and remade with her own (which she always carries as well as her towels and table-napkins); when the Captain had already been recognised and put into his place as a 'grinning jackanapes,' the Purser 'a fat fool,' the Head Steward 'a knave' who had appointed to us the stoutest, dampest, hardest-breathing and most eavesdropping of table stewards; when our bedroom steward was discovered to be a low fellow, and our stewardess to possess the most revolting cockney accent ever heard outside Whitechapel—to this last day when she said to me with sinister significance:

"'As for the doctor, I am sure he's too fond of women: besides, he's done absolutely nothing for my sciatica.'

"Then the passengers! No, it is better to draw a veil. From the beginning to the end it has not been a voyage but a chapter of cataclysms, a maelstrom of events. Suffice it that we come at last to Cape Town, and at least I shall see again with my living eyes the Africa of my dreams—mine own country!"

Thus the diary of Felicia Lissell—known to her family and intimates as Shonnie; a girl of twenty-one, very much alive, ardent as the noon-tide, warm for all things lovable and fine; cold, critical, cruel with the mercilessness of youth that sees too far and asks too much of life; witty, full of generosity, vivid imaginings and secret dreams. There she sat, pretending to be asleep, to escape the boredom of beholding Pagg, or of listening to the cynical garrulities of Letitia Karamine.

A wire had reached them at Buluwayo that Dick Cardross would meet the train at their destination, and, as they drew at last into the station, both the Countess and Felicia glanced alertly out at the dim platform while Pagg, with pessimism stamped on every feature, began to arm herself with small impedimenta and all the crudely-carved spotted lions,

leopards and giraffes that she and the Countess had purchased from the natives on the journey up.

It was about nine o'clock of an evening in June, which, in those latitudes means winter, with a bleak nip in the air, and something like a Scotch mist mixed with the darkness, to burk the eye of its rightful office. That soft wet mist, called in Rhodesia by its native name *guti,* is very much resented by the inhabitants who consider themselves at least entitled to keep dry in the dry season. But there is one blessed thing about the climate of Rhodesia: it never bores by its sameness. It is often better, sometimes worse, but never according to prescription and schedule. Neither are Rhodesians. Not surprising therefore that the Countess and Felicia, abetted by Pagg, had already disembarked before their particular specimen sample of the race turned up. The Countess was just beginning to get the famous frosty glint into her eye, and Felicia's lip to curl in disdainful anticipation of a rumpus, when a big man, coatless, hatless, his bulk held together by a very firm leather belt, came bustling to where they stood midst clumps of baggage, crates of poultry, and numbers of darting natives.

The only bustling thing about Dick Cardross was his gait, but he also had a winning smile, and there was real affection and warmth in the way he kissed the Countess and welcomed Felicia, greeting her also as "cousin," though she was no such thing except in an umpteenth degree by marriage. Neither was the Countess his cousin for that matter, but she detested the term "Aunt," especially from her numerous and good-looking nephews, and as they all nursed expectations of her ninety thousand pounds, they were willing enough to humour her in this mildest of her demands.

"Come on, Cousin Letty," Dick conjured her, briskly, as if she, not he, had been late for the rendez-vous, "I've got the car waiting, and rooms engaged at the best Pub. We've had the annual Agricultural Show on here to-day. Terrible

business. People from all over the country, and everyone off to the Ball to-night. . . . You wouldn't like to go to the Ball, by-the-way, would you?"

"Ball!" snorted the Countess. "Bed's what I want, my dear boy, and some decent food on a tray."

Felicia also disclaimed any desire to attend a Ball.

"That's all right, then," said Dick, much relieved. "They'll fix you up, 'like one John Smith,' at the Pub, and we'll start off for the farm when you're ready to-morrow."

Felicia liked his good-tempered air, his high-pitched voice and breezy "Look heres!" "Come ons!" and "I says" as he superintended the scrabble for the baggage, but she still found time to query to herself: "Can this possibly be handsome Dick?"

On that dim-lit platform it was difficult to detect anything more distinguished about him than a powerful smell of whisky, and even that she had soon discovered was no distinction in Rhodesia. But in the glare of the big lamp at the station entrance they saw him more fully, and the Countess fell off her mental perch for a second at the sight. She said little, but as usual made that little snappy.

"Surely, Dick, you are purpler, and have more in front than I remember?"

Poor Dick. She had flicked him on his tenderest spot, but that was ever her particular gift, and no one knew it better than he. It was true, too. He *had* got a good deal in front for a man of thirty-seven or so, and the prevailing tone of his complexion was indeed royal. It is, of many Rhodesians. They call it sunburn. Certainly most Englishmen burn a ripe red in the tropics, and that makes an excellent foundation for the richer colouring supplied by John Barleycorn. It was easy enough to see, at all events, that Dick Cardross had once been strikingly handsome, with that sort of good looks that, as the saying is, "strike women all of a heap," for the fine features were still there, the English eyes, the stamp of race. But he was far too jowly, his neck

had thickened, his eyes were bloodshot. Felicia wondered what Stella had thought of him after their post-war separation—lovely, secret Stella, slender as a bird, bright-skinned and sleek! She remembered the gay cocktail and bridge parties for which Mrs. Cardross's London flat had been renowned, the endless round of dancing, racing, and theatres, while ever on the hostess's lips had fluttered the faint protest:

"I really *must* be going back to Rhodesia soon!"

But three years flew by before she went, and three years is a goodish space to leave a man alone on the veld. A Rhodesian woman once told Felicia that all husbands left alone on the veld for any time are liable to come unstuck. And there was a phrase in one of Stella's letters home to the effect that it was high time for her return, as she found Dick had taken to eating his food all mixed up together on his plate like a bran mash, and hanging his pyjamas up a tree! It was sufficiently clear that he must have come quite a good deal unstuck, not only since the War but since marriage, for Felicia couldn't imagine such a man as he now was, with such a belly kept together by such a belt, ever having enchained the subtle and captious Stella. Stella was ambitious, too, but Dick's eye registered no ambition save to be kind and jolly, and *that's* not much good to a worldly woman! Yet, in an odd way, it was understandable that he should be Letitia Karamine's pet nephew and hot favourite for the eventual stake of her considerable fortune. Whatever he wore, even khaki slacks that barely met round the waist and a belt at bursting point, no one could mistake him. He had the undeniable stamp of race on him, and his curiously high-pitched voice was a "bred" voice. Moreover there was something extremely taking about the reddened blue eyes, and his childlike smile was very winning, though Felicia was not at all sure he didn't know it. Especially when he was trying to win the Countess into overlooking Stella's absence. She, it seemed, would not even be at the

hotel to greet her illustrious guest. She had gone to the Ball.

"Simply had to," explained her husband earnestly. "Everybody has to. Governor's down, you know, and all that. We're very strong on social etiquette in this Dorp, I can tell you." (Rhodesians refuse union with the Dutch and are opposed to bilingualism in the schools; nevertheless, they make use of Dutch when it suits their purposes, and their nearest town is always jeeringly described as the Dorp.)

"You look it, darling boy," said the Countess, who had been gazing grimly at his baggy shirt and shirty bags. Dick grinned sheepishly.

"Oh, I don't count. Never go to Balls and things nowadays. Can't get into my dress clothes any more. Stella has to do it all. And, of course, if the infernal train had only been in on time she would have been here to meet you—as it is, she will slip across from the Drill Hall during the evening to see you."

"She won't see *me,*" averred the Countess, dryly. "But I daresay Shonnie'll be about."

"Of course," responded Shonnie, blithe as a bird at escape from the train, and full of excitement at being back in Rhodesia which she had not seen since she was a child. She was hungry, too, and sat down contentedly enough in the hotel dining room, with Dick, to a meal that had been "kept hot" for his guests. Half a dozen people still lingered over their coffee, but one look at them had been enough to make the Countess declare she had had as much as she could stand of the *hoipolloi,* and loudly reaffirm her intention of dining in the privacy of her own room. This decision suited Dick and Felicia perfectly, though it appeared to strain the hotel management somewhat, as well as the temper of the lady manageress. But what the Countess Karamine had said she *had* said, and it usually came to pass.

Apparently not quite all the population had gone to the

Ball, for besides those in the dining room a number of people loitering in the adjoining lounge could be seen through a large archway, taking a restless and anxious interest in Cardross and his companion. There was a smattering of women, but nothing very exciting. Felicia thought to herself: "Stella must shine rather brightly in this *galerie!*" But then it was Stella's line to shine rather more brightly than her surroundings, perhaps because her mother had named her "Star." The percentage of men was pretty large, but not pretty to look at. Their complexions ranged mostly from lavender to magenta, and from magenta to the fashionable shade of deep purple. Felicia, who had a cultivated eye, could scarcely have borne these vivid scenic effects but for a few healthily-tanned specimens thrown in. One, specially arresting, appeared for a moment in the archway behind Dick, and stood there, taking a good look at her. A tall, sinewy man with a powerful face, extraordinarily brown; but the searching, dissatisfied eyes set above that insolent coppery-brown nose were sea-blue and indubitably British. Whatever it was he sought on land or sea, he appeared to postpone the quest for a moment when his glance fell on her, and no one could be surprised at that, for in her grey-green kasha dress, and little soft crushed-on hat, she looked less like a girl than a lovely spray of apple blossom in a green vase. The man in the doorway seemed to think so, too, for inconsequently enough, he muttered to himself some lines he had known a long time without considering any occasion worth their application:

> Stranger, from my old home you come
> And all its beauties you can name.
> Oh! Tell me, has the winter plum
> Yet blossomed o'er the window pane?

Either from absent-mindedness, inadvertence, or deliberate intent, he uttered the last two lines aloud. Dick, with head bent over a recalcitrant soda-water stopper, did not

hear, but Felicia did, and being a poetry lover, recognised them as "from the Chinese," also that they were plainly meant for her. Over Dick's head she looked at the speaker. A quick glance from wonderful greeny-blue depths shot with opaline lights informed her that his eyes had darkened hollows beneath them such as are seen under the eyes of men who have gone hungry many days or suffered in hospital from painful illness. Yet he looked in the pink of condition, strong, upright, elastic. What was the matter with him? All this she saw in a swift glance that seemed to contain nothing but cool unconcern, and which, after meeting his steadily, passed deliberately on. Immediately he turned from the doorway and disappeared. Cool unconcern, or the affectation of it, faded instantly from Felicia. She felt as if some object extraordinarily valuable and interesting had been held out for a moment's inspection, then withdrawn, leaving her with a curious sense of forsakenness. She wondered what it was he was looking for with those searching eyes. They reminded her of sailors' eyes. Something clean and honest in them, yet something of torment, too. A Galahad, led astray from his quest, might have had such eyes. At any rate, it was consoling to think that there were perhaps after all one or two men in the country who looked something like the heroes supposed to inhabit it.

Meanwhile Dick was proving heavy in the hand. One could scarcely, she thought, describe him as a brilliant talker. For him, Sydney Smith's bitter comment on Macaulay that he had "some splendid flashes of silence" might easily have been inverted, but he used his eyes well, and seemed to find refreshment for them in the sight of her. The truth was that he had seen the other women in the room before, and though they were not old or ugly, any of them, he told himself that, by contrast to a well turned out girl from Home, their name was nix. Now that the right thing was at hand

for odious comparison, he could see, without knowing how or why, that they were "all wrong." Puzzled, he could only stare at Felicia. Men are fascinated, without knowing what it is that causes them to fix that rabbit-at-snake gaze upon a woman who has got on the right clothes and knows how to wear them. While she in turn considered these things, he shocked her by one of his splendid flashes of speech:

"Funny Stella never told me how lovely you are!"

Not funny at all, thought Felicia, who knew a good deal about women and quite enough about Stella. Naturally, she did not say this. Her cheeks warmed faintly under the brazen compliment, but she dealt with it coolly, as she had dealt with the glance of the stranger. It was not at all in her plans to have purple Dick being silly about her. A man who has grown a jowl, and handed over his complexion and figure to the devil, could hardly expect to raise romantic echoes in the breast of *femme* twenty-one. She merely sharpened one of the blades of a little knife she carried about with her for such purposes.

"Stella is far better looking than I am, Dick," she regarded him kindly but firmly, "but I have noticed that middle-aged married men often become unobservant where their wives are concerned, seeing only the beauty of others—usually flappers."

He went about three shades purpler, and sat up as if she'd stuck her knife into him instead of merely steeling it up.

"By Jove! You haven't come to Rhodesia unarmed, have you?"

"Perhaps because I want to go back unharmed," she retorted sweetly, then relented, thinking that perhaps she had wronged him after all. Only, she nearly always found it salutary to rub men's noses in the dust at the beginning. Often such drastic treatment formed a basis for real friendship instead of stupid flirtation, and in this case she hoped it might, for she had taken a great liking to Dick, spite of

his outrageous complexion and figure. Seeing that she had really hurt him she proceeded to soften the blow by a conciliating smile, and a heavily-lashed bluey-green glance.

"I am really too sophisticated for that kind of compliment, Dick. Besides, it isn't true. My loveliness, if I have any, consists of youth's vitality and colouring—*beauté du diable*—plus an intelligent taste for all that is most simple, but alas! most costly in clothes. To give the illusion that I am beautiful I have to be perfectly dressed, but your Stella now, could go about London in a Salvation Army blue serge and bonnet without being able to hide her fairness, her grace, and that wonderful primrose-coloured hair. I always think those brown-eyed yellow-haired women have such an allure."

All perfectly untrue, of course, but she owed him some reparation, and besides, you should always magnify a woman's charms when talking of her to her husband. It never does any harm and might do some good. In the present instance it salved Dick's smart and incidentally unfolded his secret to her. All men, like all women, have one special secret that is their solace and their bane. Dick's was that he adored his lovely, heartless Stella. Felicia read it by the fires her praises lit in his eyes, by the odd movement of a muscle in his cheek, and the slight huskiness of his otherwise clear high voice when he spoke at last, though he only had one phrase to utter, and that not a grammatical one.

"She is a stunner, ain't she?" Dick Cardross always said "ain't."

Nevertheless, Felicia decided that when the man she would some day love and marry uttered such a phrase about her, joyousness must be its predominating element. In Dick's case it certainly was not. Having said his say he relapsed into rather sombre meditation. But with the end of dinner he brisked up.

"Come on! Let's have our coffee in the Lounge. A lot of them will be over from the Ball soon. They've all heard

of the fascinating Shonnie Lissell, of course, and will want to verify."

Felicia since childhood had been as used to flattery as to the nickname Shonnie and neither meant anything to her, but she was always willing to enlarge her experience of men and Dorps, so, after first briefly assuring herself that the Countess had at least some of the things she thought she needed and was safe for the night in the anointing hands of Pagg, she returned to the comfortable chair Dick had provided for her in a corner, and waited upon events. Meanwhile they talked of Dick's farm whither they were all bound on the morrow, and laughed a little about the Countess's Memoirs.

The Countess planned to finish her Memoirs in Rhodesia, and six months was the usual period she allotted to the task. But these same Memoirs had been in the making for so many years that her relatives had grounds for hope that by the time they were at last published all the famous people libelled in them would be too dead to take action. As for Dick and Felicia, both had seen that tempestuous woman setting out for dozens of places in which to finish the Memoirs. For years her life had been one continual bustling exit from England to Switzerland, Spain, Holland, New York, Kamchatka and Timbuctoo, from all of which she returned (well under the six months) empty of Memoirs, but full of scorn and contempt for the country visited and viperous abuse of the inhabitants thereof. Also, fuller than ever of sciatica. The one illusion she still retained about life was that somewhere there existed the perfect place, with perfect people in it, who would let her stay calmly among them, writing when she felt inclined, and being entertained by them when she did not. She would also, of course, expect them to adore her besottedly; pet and pamper her when she was sick and spiteful; let her alone when she felt too cantankerous for human society, and rush joyously forward when she gave sign once more of being able to tolerate

them. A very nice people and country, indeed! But unfortunately "there ain't none sich," as Betsy Prig remarked to Sairey Gamp.

The whole truth was that, in spite of being racked by sciatica, she was still extremely fond of life, especially of travel, and since she possessed an out-size income and could afford to hunt the snark of the unobtainable it was highly likely that she would be on the move until Death some day surprised her with a single ticket for the Unknown.

What Dick thought of her descent upon his veld fastness he did not confide to Felicia, but she got the impression that, though sustained by a natural optimism, he was uneasy. The Rhodesian farm had been bought for him with the Countess's money immediately after the War, when he and the whole world were sick of the business of fighting. Of course, he knew absolutely nothing of farming, having gone straight from Sandhurst into a crack regiment. But what did that matter? He had rightly surmised that Rhodesia was just the country for him, and that a life in shirt-sleeves would suit him as water suits a duck. So here he was ever since, and perfectly content to remain, but whether he could have managed it without occasional fat cheques from Cousin Letty was another pair of shoes altogether. And whether she would go on handing out cheques after seeing the farm and perhaps realising the unlikelihood of its ever paying any dividend on her bounty was also extremely problematical.

However, the great thing was to keep her in a contented frame of mind and hope for the best. Personally he was fond of her. She had been very good to him, and instead of that fact turning to gall in his system, as it does with some people, it had turned into gratitude. Besides, she amused him. She could be amazingly generous and amazingly mean: give away a cheque for a £1,000 with one hand and grudge a half-crown tip from the other. He found both these idiosyncrasies amusing.

The only thing that worried him was how she and Stella would get along together at close quarters. One thing to the good was the fact of this topping girl, Shonnie, being with her. That would ease things up a bit. Make things jollier for Stella, too. Thus ran the thoughts of the guileless Dick. A man who would always be liked by women, but would never understand them!

He proceeded to give the topping girl some vague details about his farm. Fairveld was its official name on the Government Map, but Manana it had since been dubbed and the nickname clung.

"Thanks to a Catholic padre who goes about rechristening our farms, whether we like it or not," said Dick, entirely without resentment, "and Manana it now is to everybody in the country. The idea being that I never do to-day what I can put off till to-morrow. Rank libel, of course. I work just as hard as the next man—if that's saying anything. There are a lot of us out that way. Not very close together, though as most of the farms run to about 10,000 acres, but even that's too close for some of 'em!" he added lugubriously, "for of course, you find an occasional dud here, as elsewhere."

"No doubt," laughed Felicia, "but at least you don't find the 'fossils, fat bishops, and drowsy deans' that predominate if you live in the country in England."

"No, by George! Thank the Lord we *are* alive out here, even if it's only to get into debt, quarrel with each other, curse the country, drink too much, and kid ourselves that we are farmers and shall some day make enough money to clear out. I am speaking purely for the men, of course. The women . . ." He halted, and finished rather abruptly: "The women have a lot to put up with. Ah, here's Stella!"

She came in, radiant in yellow to match her yellow hair, and by her side a leanish, thirty-fivish man, whose handsome Irish face included a whimsical smile and hot brown eyes that lit up like a grass fire at sight of Felicia Lissell.

He stood there, burning her with his glance, while the two women greeted each other.

"Hello, Stella! How're you?"

"Hello, Shonnie! You got here, then?"

Their cordiality went no deeper than the surface and was entirely for social purposes. They had never cared much for each other. This visit was the Countess's affair, and they both understood that it "let them out" as far as any obligation was concerned, but letting the world into the matter was quite another thing. Neither of them intended to do that. Felicia for the reason that Stella stood in the position of hostess to her—Stella, in case people should think her jealous of the other's youth and beauty. She, herself, was beautiful; not really tall, but giving the illusion of height because of her long neck and the little head above it crowned with primrose curls. Though not as young as Felicia, she was one of those women who would look and *be* girlishly attractive until her yellow puff-ball curls turned snowy. She had not the rarity and distinction of Felicia, the fragrant bloom of youth that caught at the heart, nor that look of crystalline pride and race. Nevertheless, she possessed a soft feline allure, indescribable but potent.

"What about Cousin Letty?" she asked, and when told, shrugged her shoulders in mock despair at having been obliged to miss meeting her guest. At last, she introduced the man at her side. He had neither stirred nor made any sign of impatience but never, since entering, removed his eyes from Felicia.

"This is Colonel Vyner—one of our greatest friends—isn't he, Dick?"

"Rather," agreed Dick glowingly, "him and Pat."

"Why drag in Pat?" complained Paget Vyner in his Irish voice, warm as his eyes. "I like things to myself." He added with whimsical menace: "You will see quite a lot of me, Miss Lissell."

"Get me something to drink, please, Padge," said Stella,

in a little, soft, appealing voice. Dick had turned to greet other comers and bring them forward in turn to be introduced, in fact, the room seemed to have suddenly filled up with gaily-dressed dancers from across the way. Felicia gathered that the Ball refreshment department had proved shamefully inadequate to Rhodesian thirst. Also, that the members of the Show Committee were a lot of rotters, the Show itself the worst known in umpteen years, and the Ball an absolute washout. But everyone seemed to be perfectly happy about it. Port-lights, Danger-signals, gin-squashes and "spots" of whisky circulated busily, and both men and women smoked like chimneys, and chattered like magpies. It might have been supposed from their eager greetings and gabblings that they had not met for years, instead of, as was really the case, living in each other's pockets. But this is merely the Rhodesian fashion of concealing worry while blithely striving to discover something to laugh at in other lives than their own.

Selections from such society as the Dorp could boast, together with "pickings" from other big towns and surrounding districts, were making use of this dancing interval to come over to the hotel, and Felicia could not but surmise that her presence there had something to do with the influx, for they all bided their time for an introduction to her and, when not addressing her, raked her fore and aft with glances more searching than benign. They had, of course, the advantage of being in evening dress while she still wore travelling kit, but her little three-piece suit was one of Molyneux's masterpieces in lichen-grey and wood-nymph green, and from the crown of her hat to the sole of her grey antelope brogues she represented all that was of the *plus chic,* and it could therefore scarcely be expected that these women would fall upon her with rapture. She, on her part, had only needed one lightning glance round to recognise that there could be no hairdresser worthy of the name in Dorp, for all shingles and bingles were bungles, and attempts

at Eton crops barbarous rather than of the barber! Furthermore, shoes had heels and straps of a shape already discarded by fashion; skirts were too brief or too ample. One or two girls were even still wearing slave-bangles above the elbow! A score of such solecisms as only women recognise hit the eye immediately. In fact, no matter what they had on they just "missed it" all round. Not that it mattered a tin-tack, thought Felicia, and at 7,000 to 8,000 miles from the centres of fashion what else could be expected anyway? Stella Cardross was the only woman of whom it could be said that she was not *démodée* in one or every item of her attire. She had soon disappeared, taking her fascinating Irishman with her.

Still, some women seemed pleasantly enough inclined, if wary: willing to be friendly if the new-comer showed herself simple and kind, but with all their bristles ready if she began to put on airs. One or two of them had lived long enough in Africa to absorb some of its vastness and to see further than clothes and deeper than complexions. With these the girl soon found herself on happy terms.

Of the men, the usual hard-bitten, highly-coloured lot, most of them seemed to be owned and well under control. Here and there Felicia met an eye with an adventurous light, the "something-lost-behind-the ranges, something-hidden-come-and-find-it" gleam in it: but though such men seized her interest for a moment, they could not keep it. They looked slack, soft, drinkish, townish, not the kind she had consorted with while trekking the earth when with her father. She had always met the people who did things, and that had spoiled her for men of ordinary kidney. She told herself that if this was all Rhodesia had to offer she might as well have stayed in England where at least the type was well turned out! Still, it must not be forgotten that she had seen two faces, if only briefly, that had caught at her imagination; and, at a late hour, when people were saying good-bye, packing themselves into cars at the door, she met

a third person, who both interested and amused her—a Catholic priest, with the soft beguiling accent that only one country in the world can produce.

Father Drago was so Irish that, as Dick said, probably even the blood in his veins ran green! but there was nothing else green about him, except the seams of his old cassock which, unlike most priests, he wore all the time. His hazel eyes under heavy lids were shrewd and kindly; experience rather than age had grizzled his thick curly hair; and he owned a nose that might have been classical before it was spread by a brick at Ypres, an accident that had given him a Dempsey-cum-Byron look. He was evidently a mind-reader, too.

"I hope you've not already weighed the Rhodesian hero and found him wanting?" were his first words. At which she smiled faintly, a shade of disdain on her lips. Certainly there had been nothing arresting so far, bar those blue disenchanted eyes in a doorway, and the grass fire of welcome lit by the Irishman, and this seemed to her rather short allowance after a journey of eight thousand miles or so by land and sea.

"You've been to Africa before, I think?"

"Oh yes, I know it well. In fact, I was born while my father and mother were camping in the Karoo. You've heard of my father, perhaps?"

"Who hasn't?" said Father Drago. "Sir John Lissell was a great and famous man."

"I was very young when I last visited Rhodesia, but I met all the pioneering men who came up with, or in the wake of, Rhodes and Dr. Jim."

"Yes, indeed, there were some regular fellas up here," the priest agreed, and his eyes twinkled upon her reflectively. He knew that John Lissell was a man made of the same stuff as Richard Burton, and Livingstone: as fearlessly unconventional, and with the same taste for life on the outposts. He could well imagine what racy desert fare

had been the portion of such a man's daughter and companion. While other girls were eating schoolroom bread and butter, she had tasted of the wild fig and the olive; while they laid foundations of friendship with young men of the English Public School pattern, she had been in touch with wanderers, black sheep, exiles and expatriates, weathered as old sand-stone some of them, others young but weathered, too; bitter, blithe, careless, hard-livers, hard drinkers, often rank adventurers, but always with some unforgettable quality predominant in them. Lots of them the world calls failures and fools. But as Wilde very profoundly said: "A fool in the eyes of men and a fool in the eyes of God are two very different things." No one knew it better than the priest.

She would be too young for them to make love to her, he thought, looking at her computingly. Couldn't have been more than sixteen when her father died four or five years ago—but they would have given a lovely young creature like that their friendship, their confidence and their understanding. In fact, they would have utterly spoilt her taste, if ever she had possessed any, for the ordinary conventional type of man to be met with in English social professional life. No wonder she was out here with that look of disdain in her eyes!

"All the same," said Father Drago, pouting out his Irish upper lip at her, "we still have a few fellas up here . . ." He added, slowly: "One at least I know of, whom it would be a feat for a woman to reclaim." She looked at him with gay insouciance.

"Blackguards are more interesting unreclaimed I always think, Father."

"He's not a blackguard," said Father Drago. And that was as far as the matter went, for Dick came up with more people to be introduced. Mrs. Amery, youngish, prettyish, and full of kittenish graces, but with something sharp about her voice and nose suggesting claws: amusing, there-

fore, to find her called Kitty, while her husband—a round, red, beaming retired naval officer, responded to the name of Felix!

They had left the Ball. Fed up with it. Were on their way home to their bungalow in the suburbs. Really things went from bad to worse in this Dorp, they said. Fancy Smithers-Corbett, who was due to open the Show, not turning up for his Fixture! If it hadn't happened that the Governor was motoring in the district, who would have performed that important Function, they would like to know? They seemed to take the Dorp and its Functions very seriously. Not so Dick Cardross.

"Old Smithers-Corbett's either on the tear again or on the tack, I suppose," he commented cheerfully, and Felicia's enquiry into this cryptic phrase brought forth the illuminating fact that an addiction to *ponjolo*[1] somewhat interfered with the career of the gentleman under discussion—a Cabinet Minister of brilliant repute!

"Every four weeks or so," she was gaily informed, "he is off on the tear. Gets chattering drunk. Bounces about all over the country from club to club and pub to pub, chattering like a magpie. This cheery period is followed by an owl-like reserve which signifies that he is getting back on to the tack. A few days later he resumes politics."

"And then certain people at home go about making speeches to the effect that no one drinks in this country!" sneered Felix Amery.

"Instead of its being the country's chief occupation," jeered Dick.

"Nonsense, Dick," said Kitty Amery. "We aren't all like you and old Smithers-Corbett." She frowned at him severely. "Are you coming back with us in the car, or getting a lift later?" Without awaiting his answer she turned to explain to Felicia: "He is spending the night on the

[1] Native word for booze.

divan in my sitting-room. For of course you know that this priceless hotel is full to the lid, and boiling over."

"No, I didn't know."

"Always is during Show Week. And do let me warn you, Miss Lissell, that everything you say in your room can be heard in at least three other rooms, as well as by eaves-droppers in the corridor."

"And may be used in evidence against you," warned Father Drago, solemnly.

"But how dreadful!" cried Felicia. "Not that I have anyone to say things to at this late hour."

"Not only are the walls thin, but each door has a fanlight over it to make things easier. I can assure you that every scandal in the Midlands can be traced back to this hotel."

"That's why it is priceless," murmured Father Drago, as if to himself.

"Don't frighten my cousin off our Dorp," protested Dick. "Buluwayo and Salisbury hotels are just as bad during Show Week."

"But why Show Week?"

"Everybody on the ran-dan in Show Week," he replied, and they had to laugh at his gravely wagging head. It was after midnight then, and high time, Felicia decided, for her to seek her much maligned bedroom, tho' she certainly did not fancy it much after all that had been said. She rather wondered where Stella was, but did not care to ask. Her curiosity was appeased, however, by a remark from Mrs. Amery.

"Your wife has her usual room here, I suppose? She always stipulates for the best one in the balcony on these occasions."

"She's still dancing away," said Amery. "And will be till the end, you bet."

"Yes . . . no use my waiting to say good-night to her," Dick's voice sounded rather dull. "I'll just see my cousin

upstairs and then come along with you people. Jolly good of you to put me up, Mrs. Amery."

There were general "Good-nights," Felicia refusing Dick's offer, since she already knew the way to her room. Everyone had disappeared except a few sleepy-eyed coloured boys waiting about to let in last-comers. Upstairs too all was quiet, though here and there lights shone out brightly from the fanlights. It was a one-story hotel, with rooms running each side of a long corridor, the back ones being quietest, but the front ones having the advantage of French windows giving on to a wide balcony. Felicia's had one of these, and though it was pleasant to have a door opening to the coolness of the night she soon realised that this also entailed listening, for as long as the Ball lasted, to the strains of dance-music across the way. However, she had a good many things to do, and, when at last she got into bed, an interesting book to read. Just as well, too, for it was about then that the last revellers began to return. For some time the house echoed with footsteps on stair and corridor, banging doors, laughter, scraps of conversation, bell-ringing for drinks, and some very frank and free cursing when no drinks were forthcoming. Felicia wondered how the Countess was standing it, and expected any moment to hear those autocratic tones mingling with the racket. Once, far down the corridor, there sounded an echo of Stella's little silver laugh and a soft good-night to some one of deeper voice. Outside in the street too, there was a tremendous chorus of greeting and farewell mixed with tootling motor-horns, grinding of brakes and shouted injunctions. People seemed to think it a fitting moment to fix up future engagements, and there were lively cries of:

"See you next month then?"

"What about Friday week?"

"Don't do anything till I see you, old thing."

"Be good, dear heart—and if you can't . . . tell me about it later."

"Tooraloo!"

At last all was still and with a sigh Felicia reached out for the electric switch. Only to find to her disgust that it was over by the balcony door! That entailed getting out again. Once there, with the switch off, she stood for a moment looking out into the lovely peace of the night no longer desecrated by humanity. All down the balcony doors stood open, but no lights showed, though like her others must have been outraged by the inconsideration of the revellers. Presently fumbling her way back she got into bed once more, and hopefully closed her eyes. Alas, a new chorus immediately tuned up. Mosquitoes!

She was one of those who found a mosquito net intolerable, especially such dirty yellow cages as grace most South African hotels, and she had pushed hers back soon after entering. Someone had told her the mosquitoes were not very bad in this town, that the allowance in fact was only one mosquito per bedroom. At any rate, hers was a sufficiently active one to keep her busy, first furiously flicking at it with a towel, then smoking several cigarettes in turn, in the hope of stupefying it. At length with a handkerchief soaked in eau de Cologne across her forehead she started reading again. No good. The mosquito liked the smell of eau de Cologne! She decided to extinguish the light again and go out to the balcony. Perhaps, she told herself, almost giggling with weariness and impatience, the mosquito would get tired of waiting and go elsewhere. But she was careful to be noiseless in putting on slippers and dressing-gown, for she did not wish to disturb others who, luckier than herself, were sleeping.

Out on the balcony leaning on the rail she looked down into the silent street. It must have been somewhere near morning. Perhaps that little hour just before dawn, supposed to be the darkest. The whole town seemed wrapped in silence a far-off and occasional melancholy bellowing of

confined cattle, and, sometimes the bark of a dog, perhaps forgotten in his Show-box by a careless master, served only to accentuate the absence of human sounds. The empty street below, broad as a boulevard, was sparsely lit by widely-spaced electric standards, but neither their beams nor the pale rays of an aged moon, penetrated the balcony's dimness, because of a row of giant gums growing close, thrusting great branches across the openings, and mysteriously rustling their aromatic leaves. Beneath that rustle caused by some wind that yet could not be felt, the girl was presently surprised to recognise a sound that after all was human. From those other doors which, like hers stood open to court the night air, came the quiet regular breathing of sleepers. It seemed as if she were the one human being in the hotel, perhaps in the whole of this Rhodesian town, who still stayed awake and afoot. The thought soothed her. She slid to one of the canvas deck-chairs, and presently dozed a little. But not for long. It was chilly out there, and she decided sleepily to give bed another chance. Standing up and yawning a little, she idly counted the doors to ascertain which was hers. Yes, that was it, fourth from the end. Stealing back down the long wooden stretch, her feet in their soft slippers of Algerian leather made no sound, and when she got inside she did not even turn up the light for fear in this very intimate hotel of the "click" disturbing some sleeping neighbour. Standing near the bed she unloosed the girdle of her gown and started to kick off her slippers. One had just gone slurring across the bare boards to some far-corner, with the other about to follow, when every movement of her body was suspended and her heart stopped dead, arrested by a sound from the bed—a murmur, scarcely more than a whisper, but dramatically clear.

"Damn you, Stella! Won't you *ever* learn to play the game?"

"Oh! . . . the wrong room!" The words escaped from

her in a gasp of frozen dismay as she realised the truth and spun for the door, while behind her the stifled voice from the bed, scarcely less horrified than her own, muttered:

"Good God!"

What a ghastly *contretemps!* Even when safe within her own room with the light full on, and the door firmly closed, noting that the furniture was arranged in exactly the same way as next door, but reassured by the sight of her own possessions scattered about, she continued trembling at the ghastliness of it. Not only for herself, but for *him,* whoever he was. For if it was dreadful for her how much worse must it be for him. *Her* mistake was a natural enough one, after all, in a strange hotel, and with all those doors open; besides she had retrieved it instantly, in a way that could leave him under no misapprehension as to the innocence of her position. But *he!* How he must be cursing her for having surprised him into that betrayal . . . the fatal utterance of another woman's name in such a connection. And such an utterance! Of all that the episode signified she was not going to let herself think. Her mind deliberately withdrew from the question of its meaning, or of the man's identity (certainly it was not Dick Cardross, and the moment she admitted that she hastened to insist that there must be other Stellas in Rhodesia than the one she knew), but even while firmly dismissing the consideration of these things from her mind she knew that never, *never* could she forget the quality of that exclamation whispered in the darkness of the room, its full content of irony, weariness, even contempt, yet tenderness—of a sort! How *could* any woman put herself into the position of being spoken to like that? How ghastly! The more she thought of the whole thing the less she could conjure up any words to describe the situation than those two. How GHASTLY!

Sitting on the side of her bed, and staring furiously at her one bare foot, she reflected that as well as garnering this beastly memory which she must carry for the rest of her

life, she had probably spoilt a perfectly good pair of slippers. Not ordinary slippers either, but soft scarlet leather ones with gay tassels of gold, bought in Algeria during the dear days of roaming. She could not bear to lose one of them. Yet how retrieve that one she had kicked so nonchalantly across the room of the strange man? Impossible. On the other hand how awful if it were found there! The only thing, if she couldn't get it back, would be to burn the remaining one. No, she couldn't bring herself to do that either. She would hide it, lock it away, even as this hateful episode must be hidden, locked away, and utterly repudiated. It was the sort of thing that *could not possibly happen* to a girl like her, detesting intrigue as she did, loathing and shrinking from any kind of dishonesty and dishonour . . . Oh, how hateful! How ghastly!

At last she lay with her face to the wall in the darkness, trying with all her will to sleep, but not succeeding. Thinking instead of that man lying in the next room. Was he sleepless too? Cursing her, abominating her, wondering who she was and whether she would give him away. She wished she could reassure him on that point, for if he was an honourable man he must be in torment at having betrayed the woman he loved. For of course it must be a woman he loved—spite of his tone of irony and contempt. Perhaps that was the way men spoke to the woman they loved when those intimate stages were reached! She shuddered at her own thought, and began to try and say her prayers, but her mind reverted to him. Could he possibly guess who she was? And would she ever be likely to meet him? Awful thought! He might even be one of those she had already met. She had no earthly way of identifying him, not even by voice, for his had merely been a loud whisper (evidence enough that he was no stranger to the acoustic properties of the hotel!) while she in her panic had spoken aloud. How horrible if *that* had been heard by anyone else, and the story got about. She would deny it of course, deny it

until she was black in the face, but would that do any good? Did it *ever* do any good for people to deny scandal about themselves? Of course not. But that line of argument was altogether too distracting, and she hastily thrust it out of her brain. After all, was it likely that she had been overheard, at this unearthly hour, with everyone wrapped in slumber? No. At worst it was a secret shared by them alone. Bad enough, that, Heaven knew, but at least both wished it kept secret. Only too evident that *he* did, by his exclamation of horror at his own mistake. There was something reassuring to her in the remembrance of the words he had spoken. He was an honourable man whom it irked and infuriated that *she,* the woman he mistook her for, could not "play the game." Ergo, he himself was one who played the game. Oh, how blessed, how comforting was that conviction to Felicia Lissell. Yet, other thoughts would push themselves forward; the name "Stella" filled her with confusion and dismay; the words he had used, and his manner of speaking them implied so much that was illicit, clandestine, repugnant to her. She lay there white and worried until the first streak of dawn pierced the dimness of the room.

With it her neighbour was instantly up and doing, but with a panther-like stealth. So cautious, so silent, were his movements that had she not been awake, listening intently, they would certainly not have disturbed her. He seemed to be putting his things together hurriedly but with precision. His toilet did not detain him long, and within a few minutes of first stirring he was at the door—the one opening on to the corridor. If he had used the balcony exit she might at least have seen his silhouette passing, and evidently he was taking no chances! As he closed the door with the utmost gentleness and padded softly past, she remembered with dismay that her shoes stood outside her door to "give her away" if he had not already guessed her identity! She had placed them there for Pagg's morning ministrations.

Pray Heaven he was not one of those who had met her during the evening, and noted her ensemble of grey and green, otherwise he could not fail to identify the walking brogues of soft grey antelope. She much doubted if there were just such another pair in Rhodesia. And she desired, oh, how greatly she desired not to be identified by that man so plainly accustomed to midnight intrigue—even while repudiating it! As she listened to the sound of his light swift feet going along the corridor and down the stair, she prayed with all her heart that he was also going out of her life.

It was after 10 A.M. before the Cardross *ménage* gave sign of life; then a note from Dick recalled Felicia's attention to their world. He wrote that he would be round with the car about 11 o'clock to "tool" them out to the farm; and further, to her astonishment, that Stella had already left in a friend's car so as to be at home in readiness to receive her guests. This seemed remarkable consideration on the part of Stella, usually so casual, and certainly Felicia had never dreamed of her hostess being among those "departees" whose matutinal energy had almost exceeded their nocturnal vivacity. The bustle and fuss of baggage and departing cars had been only minor items in the fine concerto commencing at 7 with thumps on bedroom doors and shouts of "Tea, Missis," and "Korfee, Sah!" swelling later into a grand chorus of rattling crockery, hotwater cans, bell-ringing, calls for Bath boy, and yells of children. Yes, actually some of these astonishing Rhodesians had their babies with them in this astounding hotel.

However, a certain amount of peace had eventually supervened, and Felicia (having for that express purpose breakfasted in her room) was able at last to revisit, unwitnessed, the scene of her unpleasant adventure. But this patient plotting in the hope of retrieving her slipper was vain. The room stood empty, of course, and the balcony door still gaping, but it took only one glance about the pale, un-

carpeted boards to discover that her property was no longer there! Now she had ascertained by most careful listening that no single person had entered the room since its evacuation by the late occupant—only a coffeeboy had thumped heartily and rattled the handle, then, getting no answer, passed on. The inevitable conclusion was that the damning evidence had been removed by the only possible person who knew of it. The fellow had gone off with her slipper. She had to swallow and digest this disconcerting knowledge as best she was able, and she found it an uneasy process.

The Countess Karamine had meanwhile livened things up by sending for the management, one by one, in order to present them with her full and free opinion of their hotel as a place of rest (?) repose (!!!!) and comfort (???). As a mosquito haunt she compared it unfavourably to Panama in its earliest days. She also mentioned that the beds were deplorable, the coffee undrinkable and the breakfast bacon flavoured by the regurgitation of cockroaches! At a quarter to eleven she was still busily strafing whosoever was unwise enough to come within her radius. Pagg having outraged the domestic staff by accusing a bedroom boy of stealing one of the spotty giraffes, all hands had disappeared from the scene, and she was constrained to get the baggage downstairs without assistance. Felicia, therefore, on hearing that Dick Cardross was below, went alone to greet him and to gaze in awe upon the vehicle which in conveying them overnight had mercifully been concealed by darkness.

In colour it was a sort of dingy piebald—the tan being represented by rust, the black by dirt. Its age might have been computed at anything between ten and twenty wet seasons. Its khaki-covered seats were as tattered and torn as if it had lately "travelled" a zoo. One of its doors was hermetically sealed, the other kept closed by a helpful loop of wire. The mica panes at the back of the hood were not there.

On inquiring the name and make of this mechanical con-

trivance, Felicia received the information that it was an "Underseas Model Number 5," not as some wit had suggested after helping to pull it out of a swollen river, a U Boat of unknown number and fame. She was further informed (in case she might not have noticed!) that it was "second-hand," and but recently acquired as a great bargain. Dick repeated the last item twice, and seemed so proud about it that she felt compelled to ask—"How much?"

"Ah!" said he with a happy smile, "that's it. The lying feller was so full of its merits and qualities that it suited me to believe him and get it on long credit. Whether the swindler ever sees his hundred and forty pounds is another story."

Here the Countess Karamine appeared upon the stoep, very pink of cheek and glittering of eye after a last set-to with the manageress, while Pagg brought up the rear, clutching the spotty giraffe to her bosom. The lost treasure had been found on the muck-heap at the back of the hotel.

Dick set to work at once stowing them in. The heavy luggage was to be fetched by Scotch-cart next day, and a good thing too, thought Felicia, for the Underseas Model looked to her already well below the Plimsoll line, being heavily laden with what were apparently stern necessities of life . . . a pumpkin, a bag of meal, a tin of parrafin, four bottles, (contents discreetly veiled by straw covers) many assorted cans of bully beef and conserved fruits, a large tin of cattle-dip and a bundle of young fruit trees done up in a wet sack. How this miscellany of articles would ultimately mix and meddle with the Countess's impedimenta and general comfort was a matter for time to prove. Felicia was not worrying about this, but merely thankful that she had nothing except a dressing-case to stow away. She was conceded the seat next the driver, since its springs were so indecently exposed that the Countess said she would as soon think of sitting on a man-trap. The first sight of the car had stricken that noble lady dumb, but once settled

among her packages in the body, with Pagg beside her, she showed signs of recovery.

"Can this possibly be the car I sent you out last year, Dick?" she breathed faintly. But Dick was too busy to reply. After seating himself and seizing the wheel in a business-like manner he discovered that the self-starter refused to do its job. From the way the crank-handle lay ready to hand it might have been surmised that this was no new experience, in fact it is much to be doubted whether that particular portion of the Underseas' anatomy had functioned for years. However, its present owner managed to assume, as he briskly descended, an air of surprise that might possibly have taken in some people, but did not deceive Felicia. A generous effort with the crank caused him to perspire freely, turn a shade purpler and converse animatedly with the car, but the engine remained dumb. Later two boys lounging on the stoep were commanded to continue the cranking movement while the owner of the car popped into the bar no doubt to see a man about a dog.

Number-one boy responded cheerfully, but the engine did not. While number-two was having a go, Dick returned wiping his lips.

"Is it possible, Dick?" repeated his cousin Letty, her more severe intonation signifying that she already knew the answer, "that this is the Buick I sent out to you last year?"

"Not at all," returned Dick lightly, his spirits raised by canine information received indoors, "*that* got smashed about three months later, crossing a bad drift, just below the junction of the Vungo and Shangani rivers," (since the old woman chose to be so confoundly inquisitive she should have full details of latitude, and longitude, including reasons for being in that particular locality at all) . . . "Piggy Jones had some surveying to do down there, and as the poor devil hasn't got a car, of course, I had to tool him out."

The Countess, wondering no doubt why Piggy Jones

should come into *her* scheme of things entire, looked decidedly sour, but Dick continued glibly:

"Never saw a worse muck-up. You wouldn't have known whether it was a Buick or a Ford, and the whole caboodle not worth a tinker's curse. So of course I had to get this thing off a swindler I know."

A fresh boy was now busily cranking away, and by this time a number of spectators had rolled up, some from the bar, others from their business offices or casual meandering in the street, and taken seats on the stoep for a circus.

"Do get a move on, Dick," murmured Felicia urgently, knowing only too well the uncertain fluctuation of the Countess's temper where the *hoi polloi* was concerned.

The third boy having dropped exhausted at the post, Dick hoofed him out of the way and amid the giggles of the populace applied himself once more, muttering many bad words and turning the handle so vigorously that a friend on the stoep facetiously inquired whether he was qualifying as an organ-grinder, or practising butter-making? Whereupon he left off abruptly and, with a scowl on his face, marched away, disappearing among some iron buildings on the other side of the road. He had not, however, deserted, as Felicia feared, but returned a few minutes later with half-a-dozen boys to whom he gave instructions in Sindebele that might have paled her cheek, had she understood them. But fortunately though she was studying Sindebele, she had not studied it hard enough for that. Under these burning and highly-coloured animadversions upon their birth, breeding, and ability, the boys slowly got the car turned down-hill, the engine began to purr sluggishly, and with all hands shoving and pushing behind, they were off at last. The crowd on the stoep cheered lustily.

"No stopping now till we get home!" panted Dick into Felicia's ear. "If we do, by God, we may never start again."

"Cheerful thought," she chuckled, too amused to care

much what happened, while the Countess, ignorant of possibilities, was already occupied in acute observation of the surroundings. As they dashed along at anything between 40 and 50 miles an hour, the car rattling and banging like a pantechnicon full of empty milk cans, she spied on the outskirts of the town a large iron building which bore emblazoned across its roof the mystic words, "Cotton Ginnery," and leaning forward shrieked an inquiry:

"Is that where you get your cotton spun, Dick?" Her nephew's bitterly amused laugh rang out above the rattle and clank of the car.

"Cotton's gone bung. Ginnery's being turned into a baccy shop now."

"What?" screamed the astonished Countess, "I thought you were all going to make your fortunes out of cotton, and entirely cut out the American industry? I recall a phrase from one of your letters last year—'God help the United States once we get going!' "

Dick laughed again, somewhat sheepishly, but roared back:

"Oh, that was more-or-less a gibe uttered when passing an acre or two of frowsty cotton bols wilting on their stems and eaten up by grubs. We all tried it, but what with drought and frosts and pests, we soon decided that this was no cotton country. Tobacco is *really* what's going to be the salvation of us all."

"Indeed?" The Countess's shriek had become caustic, "I suppose then it will be, 'God help the American Tobacco industry?' "

She certainly had a right to be facetious considering the thousand pounds advanced by her towards his cotton venture, of whose fate these were her first tidings. It was by no means the first good-sized sum either, that had gone towards one venture and another on the farm. But Dick bore her gibes like a man.

"Oh, well," he yelled conciliatingly, "tobacco's different.

Honestly we've got hold of something good this time. Why, a feller near Buluwayo is supposed to have made three thousand pounds out of only ten acres last season."

He bellowed the statement with such confidence that Felicia grinning beside him almost visioned (as perhaps he did) another thousand gliding out of cousin Letty's bank into his own.

"That sounds very marvellous!" commented the Countess. "How many acres is it that your farm runs to, Dick—twelve thousand?"

"About twelve thousand, yes."

"At that rate, darling boy," her voice came with piercing sweetness, "you ought to be making about three million six hundred thousand a year, shortly?"

There didn't seem to be any answer to this. The vision of the extra thousand pounds fading, Dick's eye took on a baited look. Fortunately both disputants were too exhausted to continue the ear-splitting debate, and for a long time there was peace while they whizzed along, raising clouds of dust from a road which seemed composed entirely of that element except for innumerable tree-stumps and boulders. A number of road-mending parties, members of which skipped off the track with brisk expedition, seemed to be employed in adding more dirt to an already over-encumbered highway.

"Is there any time of the year, Dick, when this road is good?" inquired Felicia through a mouthful of dust, on returning to her seat after a wild bounce in the air. He answered savagely:

"No—rotten all the year round, and particularly merry hell in the wet season . . . mud up to the axles . . . rarely get to town without a span of oxen to tow you in."

"Lively!" she commented. "Still, you have these lovely kopjes to look at. That short grass on them gives the illusion of a delicate pink mist such as never was on land or sea."

"That's a rooi grass, and this is called red veld on account of it—splendid feed for cattle."

He pointed out a largish hill called Tagati Mountain, famous in the days of Lobengula for terrible smelling-out orgies held there by witch-doctors when scores of men died to make a Matabele holiday.

"Tagati means magic, and two fellers—Fenn and Vyner—have a mine just the other side that they call Tagati Mine, one of the richest little properties in the country. They are two of my best pals. You met Vyner last night, and probably they'll both be at the farm this morning. . . . Oh, blast, another gate!"

Conversation was indeed continuously interrupted by enforced descents to deal with one of these so-called gates, dilapidated constructions composed of bits of loose ant-eaten wood attached to several strands of barbed wire and slung loosely across the road between posts which were also ant-eaten.

"Why these perpetual obstructions, Dick, that would keep out neither man nor beast?"

"My dear cousin, these are armorial-bearing barriers, separating one man's estates from another . . . the white ant rampant is about the only crest any of us can boast."

"And where are the mansions of these estates?"

Dick grinned, pointing to a tattered shanty perched on a hill at the left side of the road. Its lopsided thatch gave it the air of a skew-eyed witch leering under a straw hat. A broken harrow lay wearily before it, and a few dejected fowls scratched optimistically in the dust.

"That's 'Cholmondeley'; belonging to Jacky the murderer—feller who shot another feller for running away with his wife. Got off though—good old Jacky! No white man has ever been hanged in this country, thank God! Strong feelings against it."

"Especially on the part of the murderer, I presume? And what is that property called?" indicating a further

collection of what resembled large beehives, more broken-down farming implements, and a dog tied to a post. "Is that 'Beauchamp' by any chance, or 'Marjoribanks?'"

But irony was wasted, Dick only grinned the wider.

"No—that's 'Bijou'—Compton Minerver and Charlie Hone's place. It used to be full of stink ants, and when they got rid of them, or said they did, the Padre re-christened it *Non Olet*. Good chap, Father Drago. We are all very fond of him, but he will go about rechristening farms instead of confining himself to christening his niggers."

When not passing through armorial gates and vast Rhodesian estates, the car tore perpetually down precarious gorges which Dick called Drifts, but which the Countess proclaimed to be veritable dips into Avernus, and to judge by the lively concerto of moans and lamentations from the rear, every dip meant fresh trouble with the bag of meal and other assorted comestibles among which the passengers were wedged.

"How much farther, Dick?" a voice came faintly.

"Only about five miles," was the cheerful response. "We're more than half-way now."

"Damme! I can't bearrrrrrrr it," groaned the Countess. "Our sardine tin is too small for us, and has too many other things in it."

Fortunately relief was in sight, or rather in sound, with the advent of another car coming up behind. Dick looking back pronounced it to be Amery's Morris, carrying only three people, so that pressure could be relieved for the rest of the journey. The cars drew up at parleying distance and greetings ensued. Amery, who had a fat farmer and a pointer beside him in front, suggested that the Countess might be more comfortable at his side, but on that noble lady spying a black-coated cleric—Father Drago in fact with a satirical smile lighting up his broken nose while he waited to see what God would send him—she had strong

misgivings, and hastened to make *sotto voce* enquiries of Dick:

"Not one of those Prot. parsons, I hope? Or a Wanglo-Catholic?" For it must here be mentioned that during one of her Diplomatic sojourns in Rome she had been converted, and received into the True Faith, and in accordance with the intolerance of her character, she never let anyone forget it *was* the True Faith, and all others, in her opinion, mere jests. Kit Fentry had told Felicia that her father (who had been Ambassador at the time) said that the poor priest who had "prepared" her ought to have been given a six months voyage of recuperation. "All the same," had added the graceless Kit, "he must have had a Field Day hearing that old divil's confession of her life's sins." To which expression of opinion Felicia had cordially agreed.

However, on Dick's blithe assurance that Father Drago, far from being a "Proddy-waddy green-guts," was the real Popish article, the Countess became all smiles and there was a grand reshuffle and cut for fresh partners. Dick got the burly farmer, and Madam Karamine fell to Commander Amery. Since it could not be expected of Pagg to risk her immortal Non-conformist soul she was left where she was, and Felicia sat with the priest in the tonneau of the Morris. A change from which she was not at all averse. Dick's fount of information had become slightly brakish, if not in danger of drying up altogether. Father Drago's, on the contrary, had a fresh, sparkling quality, and he found plenty to say on that mythic vocation, "farming," in Rhodesia.

"Farming anywhere is a toss-up," he declared in his racy idiom, "even with climate and experience in your favour, but in this country with about fifty per cent more than the usual allowance of pests and climatic Acts of God against you, it should only be undertaken by men who can afford to lose their money. Whereas we are full of men who love the life, but haven't any money to develop their land, and if

they had, would only lose it, being mostly ex-fighting men who know as much about farming as my foot."

Felicia listened, less depressed than evidently she was intended to be by this news. As an Englishwoman whose people had always been in one Service or the other, she found life more natural with a few soldiers and sailors scattered about, even if they did call themselves farmers.

"Cardross for instance," the priest pursued, "as good a fellow as you'd meet anywhere, and with, I suppose a small settled income that he is anxious to augment, and ready to break his neck trying to do it out of the land. But he never will, because farming needs a lifetime of experience. It is much better for such men to go in for mining. They know nothing about that either, but there's always a chance of striking it lucky. Gold is like a good hand at Bridge—you fluke on it. And getting it out of the earth afterwards needs far less horse-sense than getting out potatoes, cotton, tobacco or even good old mealies."

Having now skirted Tagati mountain they came suddenly in sight of a distant mass of fantastic timbering and machinery reared high against the sky. Clumped in the foreground were mounds of earth, great cyanide tanks, and the singularly hideous constructions that always cluster about a mine-head. Father Drago indicated this with his elbow as a case in point.

"Tagati Mine. Owned by a soldier and a sailor who came out here seeking fortune after the war. Knew nothing of mining. Just tumbled on the place by accident, after it had been turned down by thoroughly competent and experienced miners. What do you say to that?"

"I say . . . there is evidently such a thing as luck. Do they deserve theirs?"

He glanced at her consideringly.

"I wonder what you'll make of them. I've heard the opinion expressed that a Catholic Englishman or a Protestant Irishman are no good to anyone. Patrick Fenn, all

English except his name, is one of us . . . 'Holy Romans' as they call us in Rhodesia—while Vyner, Irish as a shamrock, and from the South, too, is as black a Prot. as you'd find in Ulster." He paused for a moment, then added drolly, in broad Irish, "An' the pair of them as thick as thieves, if you plaise."

"It sounds interesting," said Felicia rather absently. She was wondering if either of these hearties was the special blackguard allotted to her ministration, but she did not intend to ask, especially as she noted the thought-reading twinkle in her companion's eye. Instead she complained of the drastic changes that had overtaken the country since she saw it last:

"All these dorps . . . and the lovely veld cut up into 'estates' . . . 'Cholmondeley and Bijou!'" She laughed ruefully, "By the way, Father, it is *you* I understand who go about rechristening farms into Latin and Spanish?" He smiled deprecatingly.

"Well, if you could read a list of the original (save the mark) names set down in the official Ordnance Map you would not be surprised at any effort to improve matters. The supposition is that it was someone with the mentality of a 'baboon scraped white' rather than of human intelligence, who produced that alphabetical monstrosity. Imagine beginning with Avondale, ending with Zoe, and including such stumers as you've mentioned—Bijou—usually pronounced by its owner By joe!—Staines, Chertsey, Arcadia, Browndale, Lovedale; Ruby Ranch where there are no rubies; and Daisy Field where there are no daisies. Can you think of anything less appropriate to a few thousand acres of wild grass and bush than Sunny-side, Bon Accord, Sandwich, Ally Sloper, Belle Vue . . ."

"Don't!" cried Felicia. "It breaketh the heart in twain!"

"It certainly doth," replied Father Drago. "Especially in a country reeking with poetical native expressions, as well as heroic episodes of the Pioneers and early settlers. Many

people of course resent these trivial titles, but as you perhaps know there's an old superstition that it's unlucky to move a sundial or change the name of a place, and the feeling is, that any farm in Rhodesia is unlucky enough without wilfully adding to its burden of fatefulness."

"What a lot you seem to know about them," laughed the girl, and couldn't help remembering Dick's wish that he'd confine his attentions to christening his niggers.

"All Rhodesians know practically everything," replied Father Drago gravely, "but they rarely apply their profound wisdom."

Here Felix Amery's voice in colloquy with the Countess broke in upon their attention. Indicating with a contemptuous gesture the adorable pinkish mist Felicia had so admired upon the kopjes, he muttered bitterly, "That stinking red grass, how I hate it! Rank poison to the cattle!"

Felicia turned in bewilderment to Father Drago.

"Dick's just told me it is splendid for cattle! Which am I to believe?" The answer was accompanied by a grin.

"Both. What did I tell you about Rhodesians? They know everything and are all of them right all the time."

In the midst of their laughter the car scudded down one last fearsome drift, and presently emerged from the dry bed of the Ngamo river upon the scene of their destination.

CHAPTER II

Dick Cardross's farm was not what the Countess imagined, and perhaps, considering the solidity of her financial benefactions, had some right to expect. From remarks let drop from time to time she had evidently pictured something like those wonderful old Dutch houses they had visited at the Cape; Groot Schuur, Cecil Rhodes's home; the Woolsack, where Kipling used to live; Alphen, the famous wine farm at Wynberg; or John X. Merriman's age-mellowed homestead at Stellenbosch;—something white-walled, with mullioned windows, set about by stately trees and trimly laid-out flower beds.

But Manana was like none of these. It merely resembled dozens of other farms in Rhodesia,—miles of grass and heavily-timbered land, a certain portion of acres under cultivation, and a homestead just like the next man's, composed of anæmic-looking bricks with the same corrugated-iron roof (painted a bilious red that clashed valorously with the magenta bougainvillæas flowing over it), the same clustering bee-hive huts to supplement accommodation; the same kitchen a hundred yards away from the dining room (so that in the wet season the meals could get thoroughly soaked in transport and in the dry season full of dust and flies), and the same bath room and domestic offices away across the compound (necessitating a trudging back-and-forth, come rain come shine).

But newcomers seldom observe these defects at first sight. The glamour of such a veld home, with its sun-flecked spaces and unusual trees overwhelms them;—the tall paw-paws crowned by their strange bunches of fruit; ce-

drillas; feathery jacarandas, bright-blossomed creepers; the cattle, big, friendly beasts hanging about the fences, in love with human company; fiercely-horned but mooney-eyed cows standing around, mild as milk; bulls that, from their size and majestic mien, would in civilised lands be fled from like the devil, here tame as cats, snuffled amiably at the gates, waiting to be patted and fed.

The natives who sprang up like an army of ants round the cars and, each choosing a package, captured it gleefully, were astonishingly dressed (or undressed) in shorts without shirts, shirts without shorts, brimless hats and crownless brims. Giggling and chattering they cast many an inquisitive glance at the three strange women, and coined many a Rabelasian *mot* about "those old ones." Could she have understood their witticisms it is unlikely that the Countess would have beamed so benignly upon them, murmuring:

"The darlings!" While Pagg, of a more suspicious nature, was whispering, horrified, to Felicia: "Do you mean to tell me, Miss Shonnie, that those half-naked fellows are the servants?"

"You'll get used to worse things than that, Pagg," was the sinister reply.

"Never!" indignantly. "The nasty dirty canimals!"

"Come on!" Dick began busily shoving and pushing them through the untidiest yard in Rhodesia—and that is saying something!—a wild medley of firewood, planks, rolls of wire, packing cases, old tins and loitering cattle! cuffing and shouting at the leaping dogs, smacking a shorthorn on the flank with an order to "Get out," arguing with Amery and Father Drago, expounding Rhodesia to the Countess, and explaining it to Felicia, he finally had everybody piloted through the outer gates and into the household compound. Naturally, being in Rhodesia, they approached the house by its back entrances. A vision in white emerged! Stella, the sunshine on her bright hair and gleaming in her golden eyes, hands outstretched in gay welcome:

"*There* you are at last! Darling cousin Letty, how *lovely* to see you, and how you must be *dying* for tea after that beastly drive! Don't you *hate* Rhodesia? How are *you*, Shonnie?"

Shonnie was perfectly composed, thank you, and not gushing about it any more than Stella. For the moment she was busy with the discovery that one of the two bare-headed men loitering behind her hostess happened to own that strong brown face with the curiously disenchanted eyes she had seen in a doorway yesternight! He was introduced as Patrick Fenn, lately a Rear-Admiral in the Navy. The other, handsome, eyes warm as ever for Felicia, and smile as whimsical, was Vyner. When someone mentioned that *he* was late of the Irish Brigade, she realised—of course! . . . the soldier and sailor partners of Tagati mine! The English and the Irishman! A surmise confirmed by Dick's hearty declaration:

"My two best friends!"

Stella Cardross put her arm round the Countess's waist and led the way through a wide open passage to a big verandah in front of the house, furnished like a lounge, sheltered from the sun by green matting, and occupied by about half a dozen people whom Felicia had already met, with the exception of a Mrs. Wyndham who sat silent, a cloche hat jammed over her nose and a look of desperate gloom in her eyes.

But Mrs. de Wilton, whose daughter bore the odd name of Hibiscus and seemed to warrant it by her flaming hair; a pert young man with a Harrow tie whom everybody called the Biscuit, and a big handsome shy fellow with white hair, moustache and "imperial," who for obvious reasons was referred to as Buffalo Bill, already greeted her as an old friend. In that tropical clime friendship, like everything else, develop very rapidly. Most of them, however, looked rather nervously askance at the Countess, whose reputation for direct attack had evidently got abroad. That lady had

found a kindred soul in pink and beaming Felix Amery, and they settled down like two doves on one olive branch, while Stella and Dick ministered to the thirst of their guests. All Rhodesians, men as well as women, drink tea at eleven o'clock. It is almost a national custom. But among every half dozen men there will always be found one or two "old hands" who prefer something stronger. Dick looked after these, who included himself.

With the Tagati partners hovering near, and most eyes turned her way, Felicia was once more aware of being the centre of attraction. However, she took no undue glory for this, knowing that on the stage of the world the youngest and freshest always gets the spot-light for a time at least, especially when she is also new to the audience. The other women were good-looking enough, and Stella indubitably lovely. But no doubt, thought Felicia, there was truth in what Paget Vyner said about the irresistible spell of those coming straight from Home . . . "with the fragrance of spring flowers still upon them," he added for her private ear. As for Patrick Fenn, he said little to her directly, but once she saw him looking at her in the way he had done from the doorway, and almost as then she seemed to hear the words of the Chinese exile:

> Stranger . . . from my old home you come,
> Oh . . . tell me has the winter plum
> Yet blossomed? . . .

This man possessed, as well as his sea-coloured eyes, that other attribute of sailors, a habit of unembarrassed silence, and she found it odd that so typical a seaman should have left his native element to come and mine in Rhodesia! Much odder than that the Colonel should quit soldiering, the world being overrun with "axed" officers out of their natural job. But to have left the Navy seemed unusual in a man she judged to be still in his early thirties. With these casual

reflections flitting through her head she listened and joined in the light talk and jests engineered mostly by Paget Vyner, who was behaving, she noticed, as if she were so young and ingenuous that he could say what he liked. Men often put up this pretence on her. Perhaps it was due to those arched eyebrows of hers with their innocent expression. Anyway it suited them to assume that she had the simple heart of a child so that they might address themselves to it through those mysterious blue-green windows that were her eyes. This did not prevent her from taking their bearings meanwhile, and making mental notes for future reference. Usually her initial impressions of people were extraordinarily true. She possessed that gift of first-sight which Stevenson calls "a certain virginity of sense" which seldom goes astray in its primary conclusions, though sometimes it is obscured by later eventualities.

The study of under-surfaces had always been a passion with her and while they talked and jested she was considering who in that verandah would best repay study. They all had secrets,—some fine, some sad, some sordid—she divined that, with the subtlety of one who has secrets of her own. The priest's were safely stowed in the strong-box of his soul—*that* showed clear as light upon his face; and poor Dick Cardross had already unwittingly unlocked his wistful unrequited heart to her. As for Stella, she was not one to give herself away by look or word, but Mrs. Wyndham only half-hid some simmering tragedy under that cloche hat. Mrs. de Wilton's cheek bones had a haunted look, and the corners of Hibiscus's mouth turned down more than a girl's should. Not so easily fathomed were the Tagati partners. In the Services men learn to wear masks. Yet in spite of his smiles and warmth she divined in the soldier some hidden irk, though it might have been only the racial discontent that torments all Irishmen—or merely perhaps that he had gashed his chin badly, shaving that morning! Neither could she read what it was the sailor caged

behind the inscrutable blue distance of his glance . . . quest of some sort yes, but was there not more than a hint of bitter dissatisfaction, mortified pride.

In the middle of these reflections she received a shock that for a few seconds drained colour from her face and warmth from her body. Fortunately, with the stir of a departing visitor no one noticed, and she had time to collect and remind herself, as on previous occasions, that the Shadow she had just perceived (she could never be quite certain which of her senses first apprised her of Its presence or whether it was some sixth sense, unshared by others, that gave her the uncanny power of seeing *what could not be seen*)—was something Inevitable, over which she had no control, and about which she could do nothing, except deplore her faculty of recognising It. For, what she saw was the Unseen. Into the midst of that gay crowd had come a Shade, imperceptible as vapour, yet of a very real Presence! When she did not look at It direct, It paused, clustering together Its nebulous component parts into a dim, grey-veiled, brooding Shape; but when she sought to focus her physical gaze upon It, It dissolved, and with the swiftness of impalpability, moved to take shape elsewhere, always just out of her direct line of vision. It willed *not* to be looked at, she had never seen Its face, but the dread she had of It was oddly unmixed with fear, for she never felt It to be Malign, only Seeking, Fateful, Patient! Sometimes she had fancied that it was with the back of her eyes she saw It. Or was it with her mind? Did some chink in her cerebral armour permit entry to this

Lost-to-light ghost, grey-mailed?

She did not know. Only, *she knew what It came for.* Experience had taught her that. Four times in her life she had seen It, and always Its errand or purpose had been implacably the same . . . to look for one due to leave the

earth soon. Someone in that room full of laughing people would be going away soon, into the Unknown! That was all Felicia knew.

Strange that her few-and-far-between sights of this pale Visitant had invariably taken place in Africa! The first happened when she was only a child of five. Her parents were encamped on the Karoo, that bare but salubrious desert, so beneficial to "lungy" people, because her mother's health had given cause for anxiety, though not for despair. But one night, a week or two before the unexpected hemorrhage which ended Lady Lissell's life, her tiny daughter, sitting up in her little camp cot, eyes roving space, had enquired of her father, more in curiosity than fear:

"Why is that Grey thing waiting for Mammie?"

Afterwards her nurse, an old Mission-trained Zulu woman, said solemnly to Sir John:

"It was the *iDhlozi* of her mother that she saw. When the body is soon to die its *iDhlozi* waits always near at hand for it. But only such as have a pure heart, and pure eyes may see what this child has seen."

The second time of seeing It, was about a month before Colonel Malcolm, a friend of her father's on *safari* with them in East Africa, had been killed by a buffalo. The third time, in Zululand, when the old nurse herself was to pass, and be buried with her fathers. On the fourth and last occasion, she and her father were camping once more on the veld, when on their way to take ship at Port Elizabeth for England. Sir John had died on the voyage home.

And now, the fifth time! . . . who was it? But the Vision was passing. In a few seconds she felt Its presence no longer, and with a determined effort she dismissed the thought of It from her mind.

The party began to break up at last. The Biscuit and Miss de Wilton, due for lunch somewhere, went off with Buffalo Bill. Father Drago, and Commander Amery also made their farewells and were seen off the premises by Dick.

In the general reshuffle caused by these defections the Countess seized Colonel Vyner and held him in avid converse. She had discovered that during some part of his career he had been attached to the English Embassy in Russia. (God help him! thought Felicia, he will never know another moment's peace!) Stella made a subtle little motion to Patrick Fenn, as if to say "A word with you!" and he followed her into the sitting room. Mrs. de Wilton came over to Felicia complaining that in the scrum she had only had one cup of tea.

"I could do with another myself," said Felicia, and together they sought the teapot, managing by the help of hot water to drain two cups of anæmic liquid therefrom. Mrs. de Wilton thoughtfully munching a sandwich, looked a harridan with her haunted cheek bones, scarlet lips, and hair of a shade that never grew on human scalp.

"Don't stay in this country long," she darkly advised Felicia. "That is if you want to remain in love and charity with all men . . . and women!" Before the subject could be further pursued Stella and Fenn returned to the verandah, she laughing gaily. He consulted his wrist-watch:

"Time to be off, Vyner, if we're going to see the mid-day Scrape." His partner rose with a word of excuse to the Countess and a regretful: "Sorry! We'll have some great talks about it, Countess . . . but it's not the Russia you used to know." He turned to Stella:

"Don't forget that you and your party are dining and dancing at Tagati next Friday. I hope the Countess will honour us . . ."

But that lady shook her head.

"My dancing days are overpast!" Sighing and smiling she parodied Henley:

> My songs are now of the sunset,
> And my feet are worn out, too.

Vyner had turned to Felicia to add in a low voice:

"It is you, of course, on whom our hopes are centred . . ."

Fenn, just behind, interrupted not exactly rudely, but with a smiling firmness of glance that took Felicia, Stella, and the Countess, in its stride, though his actual remark was made to Vyner:

"Better give Mrs. Cardross a chance of consulting with her friends first, and explaining the situation."

"Oh, shut up, Fenn!" retorted Vyner curtly, and Stella Cardross, speaking with soft reproach, said:

"Try not to be silly, Pat."

He didn't look at all silly, only rather bitterly amused. To Felicia, it seemed an inexplicable incident, but no one elucidated it. Instead, when the two had gone, Stella put more water in the teapot, and with great solicitude poured out a still weaker cup for Mrs. de Wilton. That painted lady drank the concoction with the absorbed air of one thoroughly thirsty. As the sound of departing footsteps died away the Countess remarked reflectively:

"Nice men those, especially Colonel Vyner. The other I understand is not quite er—one of us?"

Felicia, inured as she believed herself to be to the arrogance of the Countess, stared in astonishment, and an indignant look flashed across Stella's face. Mrs. de Wilton's cup clashed in its saucer.

"I suppose Felix the Cat told you that?" she said truculently. It was the Countess Karamine's turn to stare, but that did not intimidate the painted lady who continued on a distinctly sneering note:

"*Of course* it was Felix Amery. Just the sort of thing he *would* say. Commend me to the Navy for real rancid snobbery!—far worse than the Army, and that's bad enough, God knows."

Letitia Karamine put up her lorgnette, and continued to stare as though such blasphemy could only issue from the mouth of a maniac. Mrs. de Wilton, however, seemed quite unimpressed and having said her say, returned with renewed

vigour to the teapot. Stella evidently thought it time to cut in with some sort of explanation.

"It's quite true, cousin Letty," she said slowly, "that Captain Fenn was originally a common sailor. But he won his way from the lower deck to commanding a vessel during the war. Really rather wonderful, don't you think? And . . ."

"*Most* commendable," interrupted cousin Letty in tones of driest patronage, and closed an unpleasant subject by rising with great dignity:

"May I go and rest now, please, dear child?"

Bowing with extreme *froideur* to Mrs. de Wilton, she sailed away like a Dreadnought, escorted by the Cruiser Stella.

Mrs. de Wilton looked after them, and grinned.

"Bit of an old battle-axe, what? But so am I when my friends are attacked." She looked it, and spite of her artificial ramifications, something about her rang very true. "I do so loathe snobbery!" she finished fiercely.

"So do I," agreed Felicia. "But there's this to be said about the Countess's—it's the real genuine aristocratic article. And anything real always commands my respect, doesn't it yours?"

Clara de Wilton gave her a quick look, saw the spark of fun in her eyes, and was ignited. They both burst out laughing.

"You're the sort for Rhodesia, my dear! We want that spirit of fun and toleration—not the hole-picking in each other's manners and morals. There's hardly anyone out here who hasn't got something to hide or live down, but good Lord! what's the use of a big open land like this if you can't lose your ghosts in it, and help other people to forget theirs?"

Felicia slid out a hand and gave the other's rather thin one a squeeze. The rouge and henna no longer perturbed her.

"I feel we shall be friends," she said in a warm, impulsive way she had when moved.

Mrs. de Wilton swallowed, and her eyes went rather misty, but she managed a tragi-comic smile.

"Don't be precipitate, my dear. Women don't care much about me, and you'll hear a lot of things . . ."

"I never judge by what I hear. I should consider it an insult to my powers of observation."

"They pretend I only care for men . . ."

"We all prefer them, of course."

"They call me, behind my back, Compassionate Clarry."

"But to be compassionate . . . surely a lovely quality and a lovely word?"

"Depends on how it's applied," said Clara lugubriously. "Anyway wait and see what you hear. Meanwhile don't be put off Patrick Fenn by anything they say about his being not *quaite*. *Quaite* indeed! I could just hear Felix Amery mouthing it, and he not fit to lick Pat Fenn's boots. But just because one man went to Eton and the other came out of a Barnado's Home . . . it makes me sick!"

"Barnado's Home!" Without being the least bit of a snob Felicia felt slightly *agacée* at this bit of news.

"Well, some sort of Foundling Institution that he ran away from at the age of ten. Then they sent him to a training ship. But what's that matter? All decent men like him—Dick Cardross simply adores him. It's only a fool like Amery who tries to mark his own social and naval superiority by always addressing him as Captain Fenn—rather than the familiar 'Fenn'—just to show that Fenn came out of the foc'sle while he emerged from the Ward-room! No one would have known anything about Fenn's origin if Felix the Cat hadn't gone mewing and spewing it all around the place. Upon which Fenn gets a complex on the subject, and begins to take a kind of bitter pride in proclaiming his 'inferior' status . . . rubbing it in that he's not really fit to associate with us, and so on . . . and in fact, he hardly ever goes anywhere. This house is one of the few places you meet him at . . . and I must say, I admire Stella

for the way she backs up Dick's friendship with him. But even here . . . well, you heard him just now . . ."

"Oh, that's what it was all about?"

"Yes, that's the way he's been driven into going on by that beastly Felix. I believe if the truth were known it's all pure jealousy. Amery, and his brother Ted, when they first came out here took up mining, and it was *they* who turned down the Tagati that Fenn and Vyner are now taking a fortune out of. Kitty Amery is simply green about it, and you know when a woman starts hounding anyone she's far worse than a man."

"This is very disappointing!" sighed Felicia. "All these stupid social values in a lovely country like Rhodesia."

"It used to be different in the early days. But now there are so many ex-service people settling here, 'pukka soldiers,' as they describe themselves, so's not to be confounded with the 'temporary gentlemen' of the war! Bringing all their little footling standards with them and looking into people's pedigrees and pasts. Rhodes wasn't like that, or Dr. Jim either. *They* didn't ask Rhodesians to be nice little gentlemen and Public School boys. If they had there wouldn't have been a place called Rhodesia on the map. It was the scallywags of the world, under-bred as well as over-bred, who opened up this land and laid their bones here as a foundation for *us* to build on."

Her cheeks were blazing now without any assistance from "ashes of roses," her eyes full of tears, and Stella's re-entry at this moment seemed rather unfortunate. She sprang up confusedly, said an abrupt good-bye, and dashed out to her little two-seater. Mrs. Cardross looked after her with a smile.

"Poor old Compassionate Clarry! I suppose she's been getting in a little fine work about me?"

Felicia stared at her.

"I think she scarcely mentioned you. Certainly not with unkindness."

"She will, though, she will!" laughed Stella. "The trouble with Clarry is that she wants one of the Tagati men for her girl . . . doesn't much matter which, they're both very eligible . . . and she thinks I stand in the way. She's perfectly right, too, I do. She can't have either of them for her girl."

If she expected a reply to this, the result was not as planned. Rather indifferently Felicia got out her cigarettes and began to light one. Stella also fitted an Egyptian into an elaborate gold-and-ivory holder. If her air was careless, her next words held a very certain deliberation. "No one can have the Tagati men."

Having finished lighting her cigarette she sat down, leaned back in her chair, and blew some smoke down her nose,—which as anyone would be bound to admit was a beautifully-cut one, with just the right sprinkling of freckles on it. Her lovely amber eyes were fixed upon Felicia with a waiting glance, but once again results were not as planned, for the girl's arched eyebrows expressed nothing except a Greuze-like peace, and, as though she had heard nothing since the opening question, she continued answering it.

"We were speaking of the charm of long ago Rhodesia, as compared with present-day conditions."

Stella made a sound of exasperation, whether at subject or speaker it would be difficult to define. Probably both.

"Rhodesia's bad enough now," she said scornfully. "What it must have been in those 'good old early days' I shudder to think!"

This was certainly a different creed from Mrs. de Wilton's and declaimed by a different sort of Rhodesian!

"Don't you like it here?" came the pleasant enquiry.

"A good wife, my dear, has to like where ever her husband is obliged to live." She appeared to find something to smile cynically at in this description of herself, as doubtless there was. "Not that Dick was obliged to come here originally. He might have chosen the Argentine, or Canada;

coffee-growing in Kenya, or tea-planting in Ceylon; any of which would have been more amusing than this devilish country," her smile faded, "but of course none of them would have suited his idle optimism so well as Rhodesia, where talk is the chief output."

Mrs. Cardross had always indulged in this oblique disdain of Rhodesia and Dick, Felicia remembered that now, but while in London such talk had left her indifferent, now that she had met Dick, and surprised him with that wistful tenderness in his eyes when he spoke of his wife, the girl felt something like impatience, and not caring to hear more, rose rather abruptly.

"I think if you don't mind, Stella, I too would like to go to my room." The hostess got up at once.

"Of course, my dear. It's not a room, though, only a hut. But if you're going to imitate Compassionate Clarry in her hectic adoration of Rhodesia you won't mind that."

Felicia rarely gave any sign of irritation except by a wider-eyed serenity than usual. Her expression was both innocent and candid, as she mildly inquired:

"Do you call Mrs. de Wilton that in admiration or malice?" Something in her tone perhaps, stiffened Stella to a realisation that sympathy for the subject lay behind the query.

"Neither," she said curtly, "and the reason for her christening not being a pretty one you'd better not inquire too closely into it, *ma chère*, unless you want to be shocked."

"I adore being shocked," said Felicia with deliberate detachment, and Stella turning swiftly, almost as if in irritation, led the way to the garden. Several white-washed huts, spaced about ten yards apart, stood gleaming among lemon trees and jacarandas, and through the green door of one of these they entered into that atmosphere of delicious coolness which only thatched roofs and cement floors can contrive. Felicia's dressing case had been brought in, and Pagg had set out brushes and bottles on the table.

"Oh! You've got blue enamel now!" Stella went over and fingered the gleaming turquoise and gold fittings. "I still have my rotten tortoise-shell set . . . beastly dull things. But I was lucky at the races last week and shall order myself an enamel set like yours, if you don't mind? . . . rose-pink though instead of turquoise."

"I don't mind in the least."

"Not that it's much use having lovely things in this hole."

"That doesn't seem to apply to clothes, however." Felicia glanced amusedly at the beautifully-made white shantung the other was wearing.

"My dear! I haven't a rag. A few months out here completely exhausts one's wardrobe. I was hoping you could let me have a few things off you? I expect you've stacks more than you want."

Pretty cool that, thought Felicia, who had her own special taste in clothes and guarded it jealously, having besides "blewed in" most of a year's income on the clothes bought for Africa. But natural generosity supervened.

"Of course you can help yourself, Stella, when they come. I *have* got rather a lot of things. Kit Fentry, who has opened a ducky shop, offered to fit me out on the Never-Never system and that encouraged me to be extravagant and no doubt superfluous."

"Sporting of Kit! Half-a-crown down, I suppose, and the rest when you can catch me, as George Robey says? Where *is* her shop, by the way? Oh, Albemarle Street." She made a mental note of the address, thinking that the Never-Never system would suit her very well. Kit Fentry, youngest of Lord Falmyth's six wild impecunious girls, always up to some new scheme for getting rich quick, was no particular admirer of Stella's, but that did not matter, Felicia's name could be used as a lever. The girl was glancing round approvingly. With curtains and bedspread of bright printed calico, and leopard and buck skins laid on

the polished red floor, the hut looked to her sufficiently inviting.

"I haven't thanked you yet, Stella, for having me to stay. Cousin Letty rather rushed you, I'm afraid?"

"Cousin Letty's wish is law with us, naturally," drawled Stella, "still, we are *enchantés,* of course, as long as you're not bored, my dear, which you probably will be."

The words were spoken with all the indolent indifference of which she was mistress, and contained about as much warmth as the granolithic floor beneath their feet. However, Felicia was inclined to tolerate her the better for not pretending any enthusiasm. Less likeable was the cryptic remark thrown out with one of her strange little smiles when in the act of leaving.

"You'll be a godsend to Dick, of course."

Felicia, pitching off her hat and ruffling her hair, mused upon this.

"Now why should I be a godsend to Dick?" she inquired of the mirror. "I like him, of course, and I'm sorry for the poor devil, but if she thinks I'm out here for Dick's amusement . . . !"

Suddenly she remembered the Shadow, and sitting down abruptly, pressed her palms to her forehead which had begun to ache vaguely, and her heart with it. Foreboding, born of a fatal knowledge, oppressed her. Already she loved Rhodesia, what has been termed its "claw" was fast in her. But now she felt fear, not for herself but for those gay, smiling people with their hidden secrets and sorrows . . . and for one of whom the bright blade of Death was already sharpening! The presence of the *iDhlozi* could only mean that! She gave a shuddering sigh, and a cry rose in her heart:

"How I wish . . . Oh God! How I wish I did not see It!"

. . . . . .

But the next day oppression had departed, and as always, the remembrance of the Shadow passed completely from her mind. When the heart is young, and *joie de vivre* sparkles in the veins, memory does not let itself be long obsessed by Shades of another world. Especially in a new and fascinating country.

She never forgot the first dinner at Manana. The dining-hut, a big round one, with the usual floor of red cement, and raw thatch pitched to a central peak overhead—contained a table of native teak, and plenty of teak leather-faced chairs; some fine pen and ink illustrations of Æsop's Fables—the work of Dick's mother—hung on the walls, with a couple of framed old English Samplers, and, in so far, the *décor* was in keeping with the usual surroundings, of English people situated abroad, but observation revealed many an odd diversion from the conventional.

For one thing there was Dick seated at one end of the table perfectly at ease in white shirt and cricketing bags, while Stella at the other end leaned on her elbows, cool and sufficiently *ravissante* in a little pale green model by Paul Poiret. The teak table, instead of revealing a splendour of reddish-brown surface, had, perhaps because of its ruin by heat marks and wet-glass rings, been covered with green art serge, upon which in turn a couple of blue-checked tea-cloths were spread diamond-wise. Every member of the party sat before either a corner of blue checks or a triangle of green serge, and, at each place, marked by a paper table-napkin folded *en tri-corne,* lay a medley of knives, forks and spoons arranged in strange device. Felicia's share consisted of two fish knives placed in a St. Andrew's cross and crowned by a tea spoon and a large dinner fork. Stella explained with a shrug that she had long ago given up trying to teach boys how to lay a table.

"It saves time and breath just to let them do what they please," she said carelessly.

The scene was lighted by four hurricane lanterns perched

precariously on tall native stools, while one large lamp whose wick had been fancifully "pekoe-ed" by an inexperienced hand, smoked gaily in the centre of the table. This was "for Dick to see to carve by."

All the household pets—including two great Danes, one setter, a bull-terrier, Stella's sealyham pups, and three cats—attended the function, and there was a well-sustained "liveliness" under and round the table, the cats making up for disparity in number by valour in attack, and Dick helping things along generally by distributing among the combatants alternate kicks, smacks, and bits of meat.

The meal consisted of very tough roast beef, and a "batter" that Felicia had discovered Dick manipulating at five o'clock that afternoon. Even to her non-conforming mind it had been something of a shock to see a man who was once in the Guards and had got the D. S. O. at Ypres beating up eggs for a pudding. In response to *her surprised stare* he said sheepishly that it was always his job to make the Yorkshire pudding. "Stella won't eat any if the boys make it, and they make it rottenly, anyhow," he had explained.

Further items of the menu were a dish of marrow-fat, "green" peas out of a tin; pumpkin, potatoes that seemed to possess the sense of vision so large and staring were their eyes; and a glass jam-jar containing what the cook called "sauce-a-horse," which proved to be (bottled) horse-radish grated and mixed with cream. There was also a tureen full of gravy, referred to by Dick as "slush."

"Have some slush, cousin Letty?" he proferred in his blithesome fashion, and the Countess who, for the time being, seemed to have mislaid her gift of caustic retort, obediently held forth her plate to receive a helping of maroon-coloured liquid over pumpkin and potatoes. Every change of course was marked by the tinkling of a cow-bell at Stella's right hand, but no attention being paid to this, there followed a tremendous shout from Dick:

"Kowunder! Jim!" His roar could have been heard a mile off, and accordingly found instant response in the kitchen.

"*Inkos!* I come!" was echoed fervently back, and presently amid rustling of bare feet and a powerful *"bouquet d'Afrique"* the dishes were removed. When Walt Whitman wrote lovingly about the aroma of arm-pits—"aroma finer than prayer"—he had never been in close contact with our black brother of South Africa! The boy with the most penetrating perfume wore an upper garment which might or might not, have been laundered at some far distant period, over the shoulder of which was draped with nonchalant grace the tea-cloth wherewith he had evidently just freshened up the plates! The meal on the whole was not badly cooked, though Stella spoke slightingly of Kowunder's efforts, while declaring frankly that she never went near the kitchen.

"One couldn't eat if one saw what goes on there." She finicked delicately with the contents of her plate, inspiring her listeners with such agreeable reflections as might be engendered by such a remark. Dick, however, defended his boys stoutly.

"I consider they turn out a jolly good roast, and thoroughly understand vegetables; and after all, when you come to think that they're never taught anything, and have nothing but wood fuel, their bread is not too bad." Stella, about to put a morsel into her mouth, dropped it with a look of horror.

"Does that mean that you've let Kowunder make the bread again, Dick?"

"Of course not, darling," he protested hastily, "this is some of my yesterday's batch." Did the Ypres hero do *all* the household chores, Felicia wondered, but Dick met her glance calmly.

"She didn't like to think of their black hands in the dough," he explained, "so I make it when we run out of baker's bread." The Countess looked frostily from wife to

husband. Felicia relieved the situation by asking for enlightenment on the fuel question.

"Isn't there any coal in Rhodesia?"

"Plenty up at Wankie, I believe," said Stella, "but I don't know what they do with it. You never see any on the farms—nothing but logs. The boys chop down a fresh tree for every fire, but what do we care if some day the forest is denuded?"

"Nonsense," contradicted Dick. "Let me catch them chopping down good trees with plenty of wood lying about."

"You never find anything on farms," continued Stella, ignoring him, "except what you bring out with you or send for from home. These "green" peas, for instance, were grown and dried in Suffolk, and the peaches we are about to consume for dessert came from California, of course." Dick looked rather harassed.

"Don't knock the poor old country too hard, dear, or you'll scare them away—believe me, cousin Letty, there are worse places than Rhodesia."

"Are there?" Stella's laugh was brittle. "God preserve us from them then."

Yet the rôle she adopted was not exactly of martyr or malcontent. She just stood apart from this life that bored her to extinction and gaily gibed at it, while firmly resolving not to allow herself to be turned into a domestic drudge or dragged into any tasks that would heat and tire her and end in spoiling her beauty.

"I'd rather go without food altogether than have to bother about it," expressed her attitude, and if her guests found this rather disconcerting, they were, as yet, too polite to show it.

In a way it was understandable, for to a woman hankering for London, Rhodesia certainly has not much to offer. Life there is empty of the interests and amusements that seem important at home, such as attending mannequin parades, looking into Harrods' windows for the *dernier cri* in

winter sports and golfing kit, scrabbling for "first night" tickets, and attending concerts, art galleries, and the latest film. Doubtless anyone facing the prospect of being denied these distractions in perpetuity has the right to feel glum. Fortunately most people in that land of optimism differ from Stella Cardross in envisaging so gloomy a prospect. On the contrary, everyone, in imagination at least, is "going home next year," either on their tobacco or cotton crop, the price of mealies, or the rising rates of cattle. As Johnson said to his Boswell:

"Sir! People may come to do anything almost, by talking of it."

And talking of what they are going to do (next year) is the chief occupation of Rhodesians, as well as being a great consolation to them. Meanwhile the daily round of common life is stuffed to the brim with incident. Everyone plays the premier rôle in a drama of his own, while finding time to take acute interest, and, if possible, active participation, in the comedies and tragedies of other people.

During the course of the next few days Felicia and the Countess got all the change from super-civilisation that they had pined for, and a little bit over, but Rhodesia having laid her spell upon them, as she does upon all newcomers, they existed in a *pays-enchante,* and everything was lovely.

In the thatched huts, so exquisitely cool on entering from the outer glare, they ignored the possibility of spiders and scorpions (even of snakes), lurking among the close-laid grass and crooked beams. As for the white ant, they did not notice it, because that bane of Africa, well-known to be more cunning than man himself, lies low for a while when strangers take possession of a hut, and does not proceed at once to chaw up that stranger's best shoes and most cherished photographs. "All in good time," is the white ant's motto—"Don't worry them at the beginning, and in the end they won't worry you—they'll accept you as they do everything else in this blessed country." Which is perfectly true. By

the time the first blind enchantment wears off, its place has been taken by an equally blind contentment with things as they are, mingled with a fatalistic conviction that it's no use trying to change them anyhow. At that stage the stranger is no longer on the way to becoming a Rhodesian: he (or she) *is* it.

After all there is a delicious strangeness in being dumped down far from madding crowds on to rolling veld of grass and trees, miles and miles of it, flowing away into the blue, uninhabited—except for the scattered farms—by anything but natives and creatures of the wild. Of the latter the more ferocious kinds are now seldom found in the Midlands. Lions have departed further north, and only an occasional leopard troubles the peace of the cattle kraals. But the howl of the wild-dog pack still breaks the solemn hush of night, and the yelping wail of jackal never fails at sundown and just before dawn.

And the birds! How gay and friendly they are, and how unlike English birds! Shrilled-voiced kivikees—a kind of red-legged plover that hangs about farms laying its eggs openly in the garden paths and doing the broken-wing trick when anyone walks near its nest. Louries, those ashen-grey creatures shaped like aeroplanes, floating among the trees and emitting from semitic beaks their haunting cry of *Go-away! Go-away!* Bubble birds who seem always to have uncorked a fresh bottle of laughter. Laughing-doves most tenderly derisive in their mirth. Ring-doves—the female calling appealingly to her love, *Don't tell father! Don't tell father!*—and being fervently answered by the male—*No fear! No fear!* The lovely tiny honey-bird, flitting, chirping, from blossom to blossom among the fruit trees, quite unabashed by human presence. And wild ostriches in plenty. In the dawn of her first morning, on stepping from her hut Felicia had thrilled to the sight of a small herd of them streaking like wind across the lands, with a mob of excited cattle lumbering and bellowing at their heels. Even to her

eyes, rich with the sights of many lands, this was something entirely novel.

Novel, too, not to say eccentric, the mode of living at Manana! Fortunately Felicia had a genuine preference for the hardships and improvisations of the wild as compared with civilisation's comfort and decorum; while the Countess, having roughed it on the plains of Siberia, could presumably endure with equanimity anything Rhodesia had to inflict.

It was not necessary to be as subtly intuitive as the former, or possessed of the latter's malicious penetration, to quickly get into contact with the characteristics and history of those who came and went within the radius of Manana or even further afield. Rhodesia, though a large country, is a small community, and where everyone knows everyone else it is not much use trying to hide either personal peculiarities or daily happenings. Items of scandalous interest come floating in on the dust of every motor car, and everyone possesses a car whether they can afford it or not. Of course they take a little understanding, these denizens of the wilds. Anyone who does not appreciate that might be inclined at first to think them a hard-hearted lot, *capable de tout*. Instead of which they are full of sympathy and generosity, and can produce both when genuinely required. Only, they have so many troubles of their own, that with them it is really a case of "laff or bust." They just *have* to laugh about something if it is only the double divorce impending at Buluwayo, or the domestic triangle at Gwelo, in which a husband was at that time causing the most exquisite amusement by remaining in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was *de trop*. There was also the blithesome history of George Osborne, the so-called Biscuit, to keep up their spirits. This young scamp, sent out from home with eight thousand pounds in his pocket to buy a tobacco farm, had certainly done so, but bought so many other things besides, including cases of *foie-gras* and caviare, expensive perfumes, bath salts, motor cars, cycles and champagne at fifty

shillings a bottle, that, at the inevitable meeting of his creditors, it transpired that he had been living on credit for some time and could pay only about a shilling in the pound. Wild mirth overcame the narrators of this history, most of whom had been "let in for a loan," but who didn't seem to mind as long as someone else had been let in a bit deeper.

"He only stung me for twenty pounds . . . but he got sixty out of Jack Cameron," said one gleefully.

"He had fifty off me, but what about Selkiems? Owes them about five hundred . . . and Vyner another hundred!" Roars of laughter and cheers! The Biscuit's popularity went up by leaps and bounds and he was in demand at every party.

And there was Cannan, a nice simple fellow, who after investing his life savings in a friend's mine, had nothing to show for it but a heavily-mortgaged piece of bad land which had been handed to him out of the wreckage and on which nothing would grow. Everyone was sorry for him, but none refrained from ironical glee over both his mining inexperience and his ignorance of land.

Another intriguing tale was that of Mrs. Tallantyre who, farming in an adjoining district, had essayed to enliven the tedium of a wet season by plagiarising the act of Hamlet's uncle and pouring acid into the ear of her husband's partner. Whether this unkind gesture was because three weeks' continuous rain had got on the lady's nerves, or merely whether owing to the fact that the said partner proposed to go down country, and marry a wife, was a matter of liveliest conjecture. Whatever the reason everyone reaped a lot of fun out of the affair except the unfortunate partner with the sore ear, who strange to say still continued at the farm, the abandonment of his marriage plan proving a further source of mirth to the unregenerate.

Of Mrs. de Wilton the knowledge was soon acquired that she and her daughter were the "relicts" of one of the pioneers, a man much beloved in the country. "One of the

hardest drinkers you could wish to meet," said his friends affectionately. "My God! old Tim could punish the bottle!" A grateful government had granted him a farm on which his widow now lived. It was within easy reach of town and a popular place to drive to. Women, however, were catty about her affection for very young men.

"Boys come after daughter, but are taken compassion upon by mother because daughter prefers men of forty," ran the acid indictment. "And to make matters worse daughter sits in judgment on mother, and confides her unfilial findings to Rhodesia in general.

No wonder poor Mrs. de Wilton looked haunted and haggish!

Another tragedy was that of Mrs. Wyndham of the cloche hat. It appeared that in spite of being named Angela, this lady possessed (or was reputed to, almost the same thing) the temper of a demon, and once in a fury with her husband and life in general had tried to blow her brains out, but only succeeded in making a terrible mark on her forehead, since when none had ever seen her without the famous cloche from under which she gloomed at the world. She wore it at dinner, bridge and dance parties,—was even said to sleep in it, but no doubt this was merely a Rhodesian touch.

Of the partners at Falkland farm:—Jock Malcolm, agriculturist, and Rivett Glyn, cattleman—the bond was supposed to exist of a joint resolve never to enter into matrimony, the reasons being as usual sufficiently diverting. Malcolm, a dourish Scot in line for the heritage of many acres in Argyllshire, had given his heart to a Rhodesian girl, only to be jilted in favour of a penniless younger son with a "courtesy" title. This had turned poor Malcolm into a misogynist. Glyn, South-African-born, about fifty, and with a complexion of deep tan, thick snow-white hair, and a little Buffalo-Billish imperial, was an extremely handsome man, who had been for many years a mounted police-

man, and carried his tall gallant figure as a soldier should. Simple, modest, kind and brave it seems a pity he should have forsworn marriage, for, as the Countess said, he would have had such beautiful children. But the explanation forthcoming here, whether true or not, was that he declared Gladys Cooper to be the only woman he would ever marry, and as he couldn't get her (didn't even know her) he wouldn't have anybody.

Last, there were the partners of the Tagati mine, extremely eligible from a financial point of view, but rumour alleged, also of the celibate tribe. Bad, brave, and bachelors, someone described them . . . to women an entrancing combination! Men seemed annoyed about it, married women content, girls and unattached women restless. Nothing could be ascertained concerning any broken romances, and so far Rhodesia was hard put to it to account for the state of affairs. Meanwhile Fenn and Vyner seemed perfectly content with themselves and their ascetic condition, which spiteful people described as *solus* without being soulful.

They had not been long at Tagati, but quite long enough for the prosperity of the little mine to excite public interest, and even had they not been the most striking men in Rhodesia they would still have been the most busily discussed. Before coming to the district they had spent some years prospecting with indifferent success in other parts of the country, and their ultimate straying into the Midlands and Tagati was as Father Drago put it, a pure fluke. Another lucky fluke too, finding such congenial neighbours as the Cardrosses! Vyner had known them during the war, and was delighted to foregather with them once more. Fenn appeared from all accounts to be a later, but none the less valued, acquaintance.

That the partners were close friends everyone took for granted, and doubtless tumbling upon riches together made a bond between them. There was the bond too that would

naturally exist between men who had been through the great war, not exactly together because in different services, but fighting for the same cause and country.

Still it did not follow that they saw eye to eye in everything, and Felicia without much basis for it, except the evidence of her inner eye, had a curious notion that they were not entirely at one in their ideals of living. There was the current gossip of course of Vyner being a gentleman by birth while Fenn had a vagabond origin, but of this difference in social status no prominent signs appeared, and probably no one would have known it but for the bitter-tongued Amerys.

As to war records: Vyner had served with distinction in the famous Division the 16th. while the scene of the Naval man's triumphs was round the British Isles, especially in the North Sea. At one period, in command of a small fast vessel he had scurried back and forth laying mines in holes and corners of the Heligoland Bight inaccessible to larger craft, and had also (Dick told Felicia) occupied a front stall at the battle of Jutland. In Dick's opinion few men could boast a more heroic record, and Felicia with a keen taste for thrilling exploits would have liked to hear something of these at first-hand, but Fenn was not given to talking of them, or himself.

In fact it came to pass that after the first day he and Felicia talked but little together. Times had changed since the night he had looked at her with blazing eyes from the hotel doorway, muttering softly of strangers from his old home . . . and sprays of winter plum! And times had changed with her too. She told herself she did not like people who blew hot one day and cold the next. Sometimes she wondered if, unforgiving of her insolent glance at that first encounter, his charming manner to her on arrival had been merely ironical, and at times she fancied she caught a gleam of something very like mockery in that sea-blue glance. At any rate, though he apparently did not mind being near her, listening to her talk and laughter with others,

he patently kept at careful distance from any personal exchange of thought or speech, or any of those little everyday pleasantries, that go to make for friendship: and what aggravated the offence was that he could be quite extraordinarily nice to Stella and, as to the Countess, he had soon worn down her first disapprobation by his good manners and attentive courtesy. Why should *she* Felicia wondered, be the one picked out for mockery and isolation?

Totally unaccustomed to this keep-off-the-grass attitude in a man, she was at first intrigued by it, presently outraged, and finally relentless. Thereafter a cooling wind that might be described as more biting than refreshing blew between them. It would not have been so annoying had contact between Tagati and Manana been less frequent, but there were these two men, their nearest neighbours, and the Cardross's closest friends, constantly in and out of the place, while Dick and Stella never seemed happier than when spinning over to the Mine to dine and dance, and the Countess continued to develop her ardent *penchant* for Vyner. Impossible then for Felicia to put all noses and plans out of joint, by exhibiting distaste for the society of one member of this harmonious circle, but the obligation of keeping her resentment to herself, did not diminish its fervour. Her one satisfaction was knowing that what she hid so carefully from the rest of the party was not lost on Patrick Fenn. Whatever else might be said of him he could not be called obtuse.

However he was only getting what he had asked for, and richly deserved, in the perfectly polite but unsmiling stares, the little ice-cold answers with which she rewarded any remark he was unwise enough to address to her. Moreover it was necessary to show him how infinitely more entertaining was his friend Vyner. No doubt an Irishman always can "put it over" an Englishman as far as charm of manner and conversational grace is concerned, and of course Colonel Vyner had enjoyed social advantages missing from the sailor's

history—such as Public School and University. He was a citizen of the world too, and while the sailor sat silent, could either talk informedly on a subject or with such witty ignorance as to be even more entertaining. Certainly it had always been Felicia's rule to require character in a man rather than informed conversation, but she could not deny Vyner even that.

Neither could she deny it to Patrick Fenn. Even in his silences he was not gauche, and never gave the impression that he did not speak because he had nothing to say. Emerson writes somewhere of men who have the power to be silent. In this connection too she recalled the Sea Captain in *Messer Marco Polo* who was, "so restful against the commotion you'd know he was a great man." It was provoking to remember these things, and find the subject of them so infuriatingly indifferent to her.

Still, it is much to be amused and Paget Vyner was amusing. Also he had fascinating eyes and an attractive voice. The one thing that spoilt him was a habit of bitter sneering about the British Army, or at least that portion of it that went about in officer's uniform—especially anything that had worn red tabs during the war. Every army, according to him, was well-officered except the British; intelligence dwelt only in the Tommy; the British General Staff did its best to lose us the war, and would certainly have succeeded if it had not been for Foch; and so on ad. lib. Felicia often got indignant about this kind of thing, and wondered how Dick Cardross could put up with such opinions in a friend, or how Fenn, another Englishman, cared to live with him. Once when he was uttering one of these bitter diatribes she asked him rather sharply whether, putting aside for a moment the national grievances of his race against an ancient enemy, he really thought it in good taste to say such things to an English girl. He was immediately contrite but persisted that when she knew all the facts she might more clearly understand his attitude. She retorted rather warmly that there

could be no facts that would incline her to listen tolerantly to abuse of her country. Then he climbed down; said he would not offend her for the world, begged her to forgive him and promised to try and curb his bitterness for the future.

This was at Tagati, on the occasion of her first visit there —that dinner-dance given in their honour, and to which of course the Countess, spite of many coy protests had been easily persuaded to come.

The Mine, with its scattered buildings, outworks, and native hut-ments was no dream of beauty, neither could the ungainly dwelling-house of corrugated iron, pitched high on piles boast a romantic air. Mine houses are seldom looked upon as anything more than temporary caravanserai to be abandoned as soon as the "reef" gives out. But by night, in Africa everything is touched with poetry. The snowy moon has a way of silver-pointing the most hideous works of man, etching gawky and ill-grouped buildings with delicate beauty against the skies and endowing the lonely wild trees still remaining in such places with a frondy, protective grace. There was one thing of real beauty too, at Tagati; a creeper hanging like a green veil along the front verandah, all out in blossom of delicate white lily-bells that gave forth a heady perfume.

Within the house the partners had established themselves as befitted men who were taking something like six thousand pounds monthly from their mine. All the comforts of civilisation were there, including a grand piano, the latest Æolian Vocalion, and numbers of luxurious leather-covered chairs and sofas that would have done no dishonour to a first class London Club. The large dining-room ran the full length of the house, its spaciousness dignified by the presence of a fine old Dutch table, a set of carved black-ebony chairs from Zanzibar, and a number of paintings by the best South African artists. Another priceless possession was a large ice-chest actually containing a quantity of ice,

and as all ingredients for every known cocktail were at hand, together with an expert barman in Colonel Vyner, nothing was lacking to make this side at least of the festivity *un succès fou!* But every side was a success. The dinner comprised everything that was exotic and unusual to veld dinners, beginning with a very good imitation of a Russian *bortch;* (a compliment to the Countess) fresh fish, strayed from the mail-train; the most pristine and delicious of spring chickens, though it was not spring, accompanied by salad of the tenderest green, *épinards à crême,* and braised sweet potatoes served with brandy sauce. Dessert included a wildly-tipsy trifle, decorated with monstrous clouts of clotted cream which if not exactly from Devonshire at least hailed from the next best place—the famous farm Devondale; luscious melons full of sunshine, Vitamin A, and chartreuse; finishing up with a marvellous *pêche Felicia,* coffee from Kenya, and Van-der-hum from Alphen.

It was difficult to conceive of so many good dishes emerging from a rough mining-house kitchen and the hands of natives. No wonder, thought Felicia, that Stella liked escaping from her own ill-kempt table and ill-cooked meals to this haven of luxury and good order! As for the Countess, though always professing a supreme indifference to what was set before her, under the stimulus of good food, wine, and cooking, she gradually warmed up into a sparkling and witty sample of what she must have been in those days when she constituted the life and terror of Embassies.

"Do you mean to tell me," she cried, "that this dinner was turned out by *black* boys!"

They certainly so meant to tell her. Boys, black as the ace of spades one of them (from Nyassaland) the other —bronze in colour—a full blooded Matabele, who probably in old times would have been officering in one of Lobengula's *impis.*

"We tell them what we want," said Vyner, "and leave them to it. That's all they ask."

"You don't pay them higher wages than anyone else can afford, do you?" scoffed Stella.

"Well, I dunno. Three-pounds-ten apiece. . . ."

"*And* nawpins." It was someone who hailed from Yorkshire, who lovingly used this idiom for "perquisites."

"*And* all they want of the same grub as yourselves," supplemented Dick who knew a thing or two about boys. "*And* the drinks left about for them to snipe at!"

"Yes . . . we know all about you extravagant bachelors," chipped in Mrs. de Wilton, "and why you manage to nobble the best cook-boys. Naturally they prefer an establishment where no unpleasant questions are put as to the disappearance of the whisky and yesterday's joint."

"Don't you believe it," protested Fenn, "we keep a sharp look out."

"Yes . . . you do!" was the answering jibe. "How often do you go into the kitchen? Once a month?"

"That's where you ladies make a mistake," interposed Malcolm the misogynist, "Boys don't like women fussing round their part of the premises. They resent it."

"I believe you," said Mrs. Windham. "They resent us seeing their filthy hands and pots and pans. It's because men don't mind these things. . . ." Cries of Oh! Oh! and general uproar from all men present, and bitter protests from the Tagati contingent. "Halt! Don't put our guests off with these horrid suggestions. We can assure you . . . etc."

Argument waged fierce and furious, everyone taking sides, even Felicia to her own surprise, joining issue with Stella upon the latter's declaration that everything with a black skin was naturally dirty, stupid and dishonest.

"My dear Shonnie, how can *you* know? I have been in this country long enough to declare that they are *impossible.* . . . unless one can afford to pet and pamper them like Padge and Pat do. . . ."

Padge and Pat firmly disagreed with this, and Felicia, spiritedly:

"You forget that I knew this country long before you did, Stella, and was accustomed for years to native servants. . . ."

"Yes—civilised, trained ones."

"No: raw natives . . . but trained—and very quickly trained—by my father and myself into excellent servants. . . ."

"As you're so clever you'd better train mine then. . . ." said Mrs. Cardross tartly.

"With pleasure. If cousin Letty will lend me Pagg sometimes to give them a few cooking lessons, I'll engage to turn them into a good working staff within a month.

"That's a bet!" cried Stella with a ring of mocking laughter. "You're all witnesses now! Shonnie's going to run my house for a month and show me how it ought to be done!" It was not very charmingly put, and contained something very like a sneer but Felicia took the challenge in good part, and Dick did his best to smother its sharpness under gay enthusiasm.

"Cheers! At last we shall have something fit to eat!"

There was a good deal of laughing and jesting from the others as to what she had let herself in for, and stories were told illustrative of the stupidity of natives when they *chose* to misunderstand the orders of mistresses. Stories of stupidity on the part of mistresses were not lacking either. For strange to say, many women spending their lives in Africa content themselves with the bastard lingo called "kitchen kaffir." Expressing an order in flowing English sentences that contain a single native word (and that probably the wrong one) they are extremely irritated at being met with a blank stare. Probably the boy knows perfectly well what is meant, for he has acute intelligence, but dislikes the order anyway, and detests still more this false assumption of bi-

lingualism on the part of his employer's wife—woman as mistress does not exist for him except in the fact of being married to the master!

Frequently the entire native vocabulary of a British woman who has lived in the country for years consists of fewer than a dozen words:

Tata this, and *Faka* that; *Bopa* such-and-such, and *Bamba* the other; *Hamba* there, and *Buya* here; with a plentiful supply of the word *lo* (meaning as far as she is concerned the definite article "the") bespattered over all.

Sometimes the formula is varied and enriched by the introduction of English words fantastically pronounced to sound foreign, thus:—

"Cookeela lo kettle and maker lo tea."

"Bringa lo book to me out here in lo gardin."

"Boila lo fish and frya lo potatoes."

"All boys are expected to understand this strange patois, and to their credit let it be said that they do. But what about the white woman's credit?" This was the misogynist's contribution, followed by the famous classic about an Englishwoman saying to her raw native cook "Jim, tata lo fowl, pick out lo feathers, cleana lo inside out, and cookeela lo for dinner to-night!" Doubtless the fowl in due course appeared upon the dinner table, but purely because Jim relied on his own fund of common horse-sense!

Buffalo Bill, a gallant fellow, who was not going to have all the laughs against the women, related one or two anecdotes about men, who were, he declared equal offenders in this direction.

The case for instance of a man who after 35 years in the country was heard reproaching his personal servant in this luminous phrase:

"Wena ikona appreciate lo kindness ge mena!" Literally in some kind of doggerel this stands for "You no appreciate the kindness of me!"

"Another chap I knew who was in the first Matabele War of '93 and the Rebellion of '96, and in fact has never left the country since first he stepped into it, had the nerve to tell me that the only two words of kaffir he knew were *voetzac* and *ikona* (voetzac being Dutch!) If he wanted his blankets rolled up and put into his scotch cart he would simply say '*voetzac* these blankets and put them into the cart.' *Ikona* to him meant the rest of the Sindebele vocabulary. He seemed rather proud of the fact, and told me 'When they get to know me they soon tumble to what I mean!' "

"All very well," commented Dick, "but circumstances sometimes arise when it's necessary for an order to be given and understood clearly. If not there's an accident."

"Rhodes knew that," remarked Glyn. "But then Rhodes knew most things . . . natives and everyone else. You remember that he said when told about the newly-arrived fellow at Buluwayo station, hailing a boy leaning against the wall with a 'Hey . . . wena!' At first the boy, who happened to be an ex-Matabele warrior, took no notice, but on the hail being repeated went over out of pure curiosity, to be greeted with a blow and the ferocious advice: 'Look here *wena!* When I say *wena* you blinking well *wena* or I'll blinking damn well knock stuffing out of you!' "

"But what is the meaning of *wena?*" asked the Countess.

"It means 'you' or 'thou.' Goodness only knows what the tenderfoot thought it meant, but Rhodes having digested the story commented dryly, 'Yes . . . probably that's how the Matabele Rebellion was started . . . ignorance and injustice!' "

And after all these voices there was peace! The diners who stayed at the table, Rhodesian fashion, for coffee and smokes, now sauntered out-of-doors to where dancing was to take place. All except the Countess, who happily placid by this time, the bite gone from her speech and malice from her eyes: nothing left in fact but a rather drowsy old woman with the beatific smile that comes of a

full . . . well, heart! . . . wisely elected that Dick should run her home in the car, to bed.

The rest amused themselves in the moonlight until such time as the impromptu ball-room should be ready for business. The twelve people for dinner had been reinforced by about twenty more for the dance. On the piano, now moved to the verandah, someone was making happy ripples of sound, someone else relentlessly tuned a banjo. Mrs. de Wilton and two boisterous young men made joyful noises with jazz instruments. A number of others were throwing shavings of candle-wax on to a large bucksail pegged out to constitute a dancing floor, and doing running slides on it. Laughter rang gaily on the clear air, and the great white-belled creeper sprawled in a sheet of lilies over roof and verandah sent forth a sweet and heady fragrance into the night. These things, both exciting and soothing to Felicia as she strolled about the tennis courts with Paget Vyner, may have had something to do with her listening fairly tolerantly to his tale of grief against the British. . . . How he had loved and been proud of the 16th Division, and its composition—entirely Irish before the war, and more than entirely loyal to the Empire. How terribly during the first two years of fighting its ranks had been depleted, but nevertheless willingly filled up again from Ireland, spite of the bitter trouble of 1916 raging there. Even with the tragedy of Easter week impending there was no lack of recruits for the 16th. As long as Irishmen knew that it was for their famous Division they were bound they came forward eagerly.

"But it was then the black mistake was made," said Vyner sombrely. "England or the English War Office—no matter which, rewarded us with suspicion and distrust. The bread of loyalty was received as if it had been tainted, poisoned. The recruited Irish never reached their own Division, but were drafted into other regiments, while the bloody gaps in the 16th were filled with Scotch, Welsh and English. *That* implication of treachery will rankle for ever. It broke

us—a Division officered by the best stock of Ireland, its traditions drenched with loyal blood! It broke us, and you can't blame us that we can never forget it."

"A terrible mistake," agreed Felicia. "All war offices make mistakes, but such a thing should not be confounded with *real* England, 'Mother and lover of brave and loyal men.' . . ."

But Vyner, like an Israelite by the waters of Babylon, would not be comforted, and later when dancing with her again reverted to the subject.

"Consider me," he gloomed, "a soldier who loved his profession and won his spurs in it while young. Do you think it meant nothing to me to chuck everything and come to Africa to look for a job? Even though I was lucky, how does mining compare, do you suppose with soldiering? Gold-grubbing. . . . When one has the love of fighting in one's veins!"

"I suppose we are all born with some predominating passion in our veins," she laughed. "You must not quarrel with me if mine happens to be for Empire."

"I couldn't quarrel with you."

"Nor be surprised if I can't feel real friendship for anyone who has no use for the British."

"Perhaps it's not your friendship I am seeking."

This reply fell so softly into her ear that it was quite possible to wonder if she had really heard or only imagined it and the words that followed.

". . . but something infinitely more precious and wonderful."

Even to one accustomed to rapidity in love-making she thought this pretty swift going after a week or so's acquaintance; if he really *had* said it. But she couldn't be quite sure, and didn't want to be. His voice blended so softly with the soft delicious wind and the scent of the white bells. Overhead the moon curved in a mother-of-pearl crescent,

the stars glittered like precious gems set in an immense bowl of *Sèvres* enamel. It was one of Africa's glad intoxicating nights. Felicia decided that if the words were spoken she had not heard them.

. . . . . .

Almost immediately after that night in Tagati, she set herself to the task she had been challenged into undertaking the intensive training of the farm staff. She felt pretty certain that with the practical assistance of Pagg from whom few secrets of housekeeping were hid, added to her own experience of the splendid services Sir John Lissell had always got out of natives she would be able to do something with that little band of rascals. It was not that she had any keener taste than Stella herself for domesticity, but at least she liked things clean and well-ordered, and to sit down to a dainty mean occasionally. And if "boys" could do these things with dash at Tagati why not at Manana? Besides she knew that though the Countess seemed satisfied for the time being, and had settled down amiably to her Memoirs, this happy state of things could not last unless more material comfort and good-living were thrown into the scale. It was sad too, to see so little nourishment and comfort afforded to Dick after his day's hard work on the lands. No wonder he drank. And no wonder he had got into the way of eating his dinner like a bran-mash and hanging his pyjamas up a tree! He might have hung his dinner up the tree and bran-mashed the pyjamas for all Stella cared!

That very modern wife, so far from objecting to anyone else running her house for her, practically insisted on Felicia's carrying out the bargain.

"As long as you don't expect *me* to join in the good work, as I happen to have a few other interests in life than training kaffirs."

She didn't mention what these interests were, but evidently

getting into the car and dashing off somewhere was one of them. Another, perhaps, was letter-writing, for she always had an enormous packet of correspondence ready on mail-days. Too, she spent a great deal of time over her clothes, often roping Pagg in, for various sewing jobs. And it appeared that by the hour she did exercise for keeping and improving the figure. Pagg was rather scandalized about it.

"Lying on the floor of her hut in a bathing-dress with her legs making circles in the air!" she sniffed. "And one she calls *ler serpont* . . . wriggling about all over the floor on her stomach . . . reely, m'lady, it doesn't seem ladylike. . . . "

"Young women of to-day *aren't* ladylike, Pagg. I wonder you don't know that by now," snorted the Countess. "But they're healthy, and they'll do anything to keep slim . . . except curb their appetites for food and drink. Though some I'm told make even that sacrifice."

"I never saw anyone more determined to keep their figure than Mrs. Cardross. *And* her complexion! The way she works at it with creams and oils . . . kneading and patting herself all over! *She* doesn't intend to live in this out-of-the-way place forever. You can tell *that,* m'lady."

But the Countess having heard enough for her own purposes spoke curtly:

"That'll do, Pagg . . . Damme! Don't you see I'm writing?"

Which effectively shut the sour-faced one up for the moment, but did not prevent her from thinking her thoughts about the lady in question! Nor indeed the Countess from thinking hers. She had her own private opinion, and not a flattering one of Dick's wife. Still, if he was satisfied it was not for her to carp. She wished to be at peace and finish her Memoirs. The clean high air of Manana suited her, making her brain feel young and clear, and though her sciatica was as tiresome as ever, it at least gave her an excuse to lie abed most of the day, and she always wrote better in bed.

She managed however, from curiosity and a general desire to know what was going on, to be up and about the morning Felicia started operations on the farm staff, and came hobbling, on her stick, to help inspect the premises ruled over by them.

The kitchen was a perfectly good one, large and light, but buzzing with flies, the walls badly needing white-wash and hundreds of ants and cockroaches running about the floor. The three wooden tables would certainly have been the better for a good scrub, and the medley of broken and useless articles on the shelves gave furiously to ponder upon the "monkey mentality" of natives.

"There is nothing a nigger won't break," the saying runs, "but once it's broken he'll treasure it for ever."

Broken bottles, empty tins and bits of rag, are given pride of place among the best china, while good and useful household articles are left dirty and cast aside with the utmost carelessness. Therefore the first good deed indicated in a naughty world was a lecture on domestic hygiene, which Felicia delivered, assisted by the Countess, with interpretations and additions by Dick, to a row of four boys who stood with eyes modestly cast down when she was looking at them and wriggling with hilarious malice when she was not.

There was Concha, a wild-eyed fellow with filed teeth, naked but for a loin-cloth and the handle of a tooth brush stuck coquettishly in the lobe of his ear, whose job it was to bring the milk from the kraal every morning in a four-gallon paraffin tin (produced). To him it was laboriously explained that said tin should be scalded out every day and the glass-cloth lent him to cover it, be kept scrupulously clean. To which Dick added a menacing admonition:

"And don't use it for a blanket at night, you scoundrel, or to wipe your dirty mug on, or I'll etc., etc.,"

Fritty (derived from Frederick), and Jim Sow, two sprightly house-boys in their teens, wearing sandals made of discarded Dunlop tyres and shorts obviously cut down from

Dick's old pyjamas, were instructed how to scour saucepans and block up cockroach holes with mud and disinfectant. They listened entranced. "Just as though you haven't been told it all before, a thousand times, you lazy untranslatables," muttered Dick, "and I bet you do it . . . *once.*" As for the cook, a bland Nyassaland boy whom Dick declared to be as shrewd as a bob-tailed cat and as unscrupulous, he made it clear in quite good English that nothing short of a cooking demonstration would fill his bill.

"I much good cook if Missis make it show me how."

At this junction Pagg was brought on the scene, though with no very good grace, to give her first demonstration of cooking. Scorn and disgust imprinted upon her genteel features, she firmly refused to do it in the kitchen, appealing to her mistress:

"I reely *couldn't,* m'lady. It needs at least a week's turn out before a decent Norfolk woman could henter there." Plain as the nose on her face that Pagg would never be a Rhodesian, decent or indecent. Instead, when a table was set for her, beneath a tree in the yard she began at once like a good old British workman to quarrel with her tools: What! No paste board? A whisky bottle for a rolling pin! The flour sieve with a large hole in its middle? The sugar-sifter with no middle at all, baking tins full of old grease and rust, saucepans with burnt bottoms, casseroles cracked and lidless!

"Dear, dear!" she moaned almost audibly, "What feckless-ness, what low and common arrangements! How vulgar and despicable was life on the veld! And wood fuel! . . . how *could* anything be done to a turn with such an uncertain fire?"

Nevertheless her machinations with flour, butter, eggs and suet were successful, and their subsequent results most gratifying, for the dark intelligent eyes of that chief "cani-mal" observing her like a hawk watching a brood of chickens, missed nothing.

Kowunda certainly had culinary genius. After a few days

of experimenting there came from his hands a Yorkshire pudding as delicious as ever made in any of the fifty-two English counties; and a cake which would not have disgraced a Bond Street tea-room. Thereafter dinner was never lacking a sweet or savoury; and under Pagg's grudging tuition he learned to lay the table faultlessly.

Felicia found these domestic developments as fascinating as watching seedlings thrust from the soil into leaf and blossom. She thoroughly enjoyed attacking the household problems that daily arose, helping to smooth things out, and generally making the farm a gayer and more comfortable place. Pagg used to say to her, at least she only said it once in that particular form:

"My! Miss Shonnie, you *do* earn your keep!"

"But no one is keeping me, Pagg." She raised innocent eyebrows.

"Oh! *Of course not,* Miss Shonnie!" Pagg's refinement was extremely outraged. "Of course I didn't mean anything like *that.*"

"Anything like what?" her tormentor mercilessly pursued, throwing the genteel one into such confusion that she didn't know what or where she was, though Felicia could have told her:—a horrid-minded old spinster at the dangerous age; always thinking of those things that were not for her and never would be.

However, spite of the fun she got out of proving herself as useful as she was ornamental Felicia was aware that these things did not really compose any real reason for being liked any better by Stella. In fact not only did incompatibility of temperament and outlook increase between them, but soon something very like hostility began to take shape . . . hostility that she herself did not feel wholly responsible for, and fought against joining in, for, while clearly recognising on what selfish lines Stella was planned, she could have made allowances for that, if it were all. Lots of selfish people are extremely lovable, especially when as attractive

as Stella, and it was evident for instance, that with all her faults Dick found her adorable. And there were others . . . those men at Tagati . . . obviously held in the thrall of her bright laughter and amber eyes. Yet Felicia with her deeper insight could not but be aware of something dark, unfathomable beneath that surface brightness. She remembered once standing by a deep reservoir in a lonely part of Jersey; the sun lay on its surface, the trees were brilliant all about it, but it was deep, deep; and still, with a terrifying stillness; nothing stirred in its depths; it was not alive and warm like moving water, a stream, even a friendly pond; but secret, treacherous, menacing. She felt that anything sunk in those depths would be lost for ever, and she had hurried away from it, her heart shivering in her breast. Sometimes the same curious urge seized her to hurry away from Stella, though she never did, being naturally courageous with an instinct always where human beings and emotions were concerned, to see things through. But it was far from pleasant to sense as she often did, hostility that amounted to hatred reaching out after her like a keen searching blade. It made her sorry for Stella too. For if it is unpleasant to be hated, how much worse to do the hating! To feel the virus clogging up heart and soul, destroying the harmony of the whole system! With no possible way of letting off steam either! For naturally the Countess, being the one person Stella wished not to offend must not guess, nor Pagg, who had a way of running like a setter with a bird to her mistress, carrying any sensational idea she managed to pick up. As for Dick, he must never be allowed either, to know of the secret likes and dislikes of the golden woman he had married. Of course she may have had an outside confidant: it was almost to be hoped so, for her own sake!

Nevertheless Felicia often gave herself a headache pondering wherein and why she had called down this malediction of hatred upon herself. It couldn't have been clothes, be-

cause when in that first flush of Rhodesian glamour she had given Stella *carte blanche* to help herself, the invitation had been liberally accepted to the extent of two of Kit Fentry's most original jumpers, a jolly little tan-and-scarlet linen by Foulds, and numerous scarves, undies, and silk stockings. Not a bad haul considering the lovely garments already stocking Mrs. Cardross's wardrobe, also that scarcely a mail passed without bringing some gadget from Bond Street or Paris! Stella was lucky at racing it seemed, and able to replenish her wardrobe by this means.

It couldn't have been looks either, Felicia had decided, for there never yet existed an ash-blonde not perfectly content with herself and secure in the belief that no woman of any other colouring could touch her. As to shape they did not differ overmuch. Felicia had the advantage in height, by several inches, but both were slender, Felicia by nature, Stella by dint of endless exercises and a perfect system of massage performed with a celluloid rolling-pin. She spent hours in the seclusion of her hut doing these things, and never considered the time wasted. Wonderful too, when it came to altering Felicia's things for her own use, how clever she could be. As Shakespeare has said:

"The hand of small employment hath the daintier sense."

Perhaps then the offence lay in their difference of age? Felicia had just passed her twenty-first birthday, while Stella had stopped dead somewhere between twenty-eight and thirty, an age which the Countess, one day when they were all in the verandah, declared to be the ideal period of a modern woman's life, because by then she had cast all her gaucheries together with any illusions and morals she might have started with, and could enjoy herself without handicaps. Dick and Vyner chuckled at this, Fenn received it with a reflective stare and Stella opened beautiful wondering eyes that contained a mischievous but rather astonished enquiry.

"Who *can* you have been associating with lately, dear

Cousin Letty? Anyway, I'm glad *I'm* not as modern as all that. Perhaps Shonnie who has been about the world such a lot can tell us how true it is."

One of her prickly little habits was this implication that Felicia, not she, was the matured one—far more versed in the world's wicked ways than a golden lady sitting on the veld could expect to be! She always used this gambit in public, though when they were alone together she could be just as irritating in the opposite direction with her assumption that marriage gave her a broader outlook on life than any unmarried girl could expect to possess. Such ways as between woman and woman are not endearing. No use pretending that they are. But no use either in showing irritation, when you are meant to be irritated. So Felicia just smiled. In this instance she replied that unfortunately her marchings about the world had afforded her so few opportunities of knowing modern women really intimately that she was not qualified to express any opinion.

"As for cousin Letty's ideal age—I must be unnatural, for I prefer my own, spite of its burden of gaucheries and illusions."

"No, no," protested Vyner, "we are grateful for the illusions, hoping that they include us, but gaucheries in you we will not admit."

"You don't mention morals I notice," laughed Stella on a silvery note.

"I didn't think it necessary," returned Felicia tranquilly.

"Morals seldom *are* mentioned . . . except when absent." The Countess having fired this glancing shot over the top of tortoise-shell spectacles clicked her knitting needles spitefully. She had just been fixing up with Fenn that he should drive her every Sunday to hear Mass at Father Drago's Mission church, for of course as soon as she had discovered Fenn to be a Catholic, there had been a complete *volte face* in his favour and now he could do no wrong. Catholics always hang together! Father Drago's was some miles nearer

than the Dorp where there was also a church, but the Countess disliked and not without reason, that route of stocks and stones. Also she infinitely preferred Fenn's car to the loathsome Underseas, and no one could blame her for that! With regard to cars there had now commenced a heated discussion as to whether a "nobby little two-seater" could not be presented by Tagati to Manana, for the use of the ladies, and why not? The "Nays" seemed to be confined to Dick. Stella was all for it, and indeed Felicia saw nothing against the plan, either, since presents from bachelors to their women friends, married or unmarried, seemed all the go, in Rhodesia. But Dick was proving unexpectedly obstinate.

"I don't care about it, old man," he said to Vyner, with a stiffness unusual to him.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. It is ridiculous for your wife to be scuttling round in that old van while there are bags of perfectly good little contraptions going begging at Spindler's Garage."

"Yes, but there ain't bags of *ooftish* in my Bank account at the present moment."

"What does that matter?" expostulated Vyner. "And what on earth is the good of pals if you can't lift an occasional footling little car off them?"

"Dick's charming attitude," said Stella with the patience of an angel, "is that if *he* can't give me a car, no one else shall," she directed a honeyed smile at her husband. "Isn't it, Dick?"

"If you say so, it must be," was the answer, given with a surliness that surprised everyone.

"That's that then," said Stella, meaning, "If you suppose I am going to sit down under *that* fiat, you're mistaken, my lad." But Vyner resigned himself. Men recognise finality when it is expressed. It wasn't worth disputing about, and he did not wish to quarrel with Dick. As for the Countess, she squinted in several directions at once while the argu-

ment was going on, and though she said nothing probably, like the Admiral's parrot, she was doing a devil of a lot of thinking.

This was one of those times when Felicia, while the Tagati men were present, allowed herself to be of the party. She did not always do this, only in fact when Dick or the Countess were there too, or on occasions of general gatherings. Otherwise indeed she might always have been loafing in the verandah, for the two men, singly or together, either from reasons or friendship, or other motives simple or compound, were never long away from Manana's front door. Daily, one or both, arrived with books, with papers, with news, or fruit, or flowers, to find out if anyone wanted anything from the Dorp, or could be given a lift there. Any excuse did, though excuses were not in the least necessary. Obviously they were at Stella's beck and call, and had been for months before the arrival of the visitors. It was only natural, that so pleasant a state of affairs should continue. True, there was a special effort, notably on the part of Vyner, to make Felicia feel herself included. But without ceasing to be quite charming and friendly she politely held back from a share in these attentions. Stella's assertion on the first day, that these men "belonged" to her, and no intruders would be brooked, stuck in the girl's mind, and she scornfully resolved that, if incapable of attracting men for herself, she would certainly not seek to share those in another's train. Stella should have no cause for grief on *that* score at least. Her "belongings" were freely conceded to her. But did *they feel* it a concession? . . . or was it possibly something more in the nature of a condemnation? Felicia smiling to herself, a delicious curved smile, had her own answer to the question. After all, it would have been hard if she could not get a little fun out of life. Running Stella's house was not as amusing as all that. Not nearly so amusing, for instance, as darting off to Dorp every other day in the company of an adorer! Naturally Mrs. Cardross had chosen

for herself the pleasanter part of the new *régime* . . . the part that took her away from home as much as possible!

"While you are training the boys," she blandly explained, "you'll of course have no time to go into town to see about household requirements, so *I'll* undertake the shopping."

And very badly she did it, nearly always forgetting half the things required, and sometimes (Felicia was certain without being sure) not going to the Dorp at all. For Tagati was on the way to the Dorp, and on the whole a much more amusing place.

But upon days in between, it sometimes became Felicia's turn to amuse herself. Whenever it happened that they four found themselves alone together in the verandah, or sitting-room, she would softly and unobtrusively withdraw her presence from their radius. It was never done pointedly. It just happened that she had affairs elsewhere. With her it was one moment *est* and the next moment mysteriously and elusively *non est*. And if this innocent "passing" of hers left them faintly disconcerted, with an uneasy feeling of being stranded, perhaps even with a shadow of guilt hovering among them, well . . . whose fault was that? Stella's with her triumphant monopolies? . . . Fenn's of the seeking glance? . . . Vyner's with frank discontent in his beguileful eyes? Whosoever's the fault she left them to it, and mostly she smiled like a child enjoying a fascinating game. But sometimes a memory leapt into her mind:—the memory of that night when in the strange room of a hotel she had lost a red slipper! Then the smile would fade, and her eyes take a stern look. By this time most contemporary Rhodesians had been discussed in her presence, but, so far, she had heard of no other Stella in the country. Which then, of those two men of Tagati, had softly and bitterly cursed that name in the darkness?

CHAPTER III

CERTAINLY life at Manana was never without a thrill, and Felicia got a rather horrible one at midnight once when awakened by the frantic bellowing of some animal evidently in the throes of pain and fear. The sound came from afar, well beyond the river she judged, yet on the still night air the cry quivered clear, setting the girl's blood curdling, and the hair moving on her scalp. After a few minutes there were the coughing gasps of a creature sobbing out its life. Then, except for the barking of dogs, silence.

Ghastly! she thought. Ghastly to have a creature murdered like that on your very threshold, and be able to do nothing! Even merely guessing at what horror was taking place kept her awake for the rest of the night and she was thankful for the dawn and a morning world that looked too fresh and sweet for anything ugly to happen in it.

She wondered if she had been the only recipient of those tidings of death, but Dick whom she met sauntering bathwards admitted having heard and recognised that one of his cattle was being attacked by some beast of prey. But no use getting up, he declared, as the doomed animal would be "a goner" within 5 minutes, and the attacker, gorged with blood, gone on its way.

A good thing Felicia was up early, for Kowunder, having delivered tea at every hut, and returned to his kitchen, started chopping ham for an omelette, and, with habitual native clumsiness in using civilised implements, had practically chopped his thumb off. It was hanging by a few bits of skin and muscle when Fritty fetched her to tackle the job of washing and binding the injury. Then, Kowunder being out

of court for the day, as far as cooking was concerned, she hurried to press Pagg into service.

The Countess always breakfasted in bed on charcoal biscuits and rarely appeared before eleven A.M.—so Pagg at that hour, was more or less at a loose end. Still she needed more than beguiling to enter "that there dirty kitchen," and it was only after being bribed with an orange silk jumper ("Oh, Miss Shonnie, I couldn't really take it!") in which Felicia thanked goodness she would look horrible, that she could be got to finish the omelette and make the coffee.

Breakfast no sooner over than a boy arrived from the compound where the fowls were kept, carrying what in restaurant would be termed "a half-portion of fowl." Together with this horrid burden—a hen with its head, neck, and breast torn away—he brought a tragic tale, and an old biscuit tin containing half-a-dozen newly hatched chicks. An eagle having attacked her brood the poor mother had paid the penalty of devotion by being torn to pieces on her nest. Dick, after hearing this saga handed the "half-portion" back to the boy who went away full of joy, scattering generous invitations to the other boys for a "hen-party" that night. No one seemed to know what to do with the rest of the consignment of woe, and the little yellow things cheeped piteously. Felicia concluded that they were hungry, and after preparing a meal of egg-and-bread crumbs for them, she lined their tin with a piece of flannel, and put them in a warm place by the kitchen range.

The next item on the programme of a busy day was the arrival of another patient, this time one of the land boys, who had trodden on something sharp and wounded his foot. Natives are careless creatures, always hacking themselves about in some fashion or achieving wounds in their hands and feet, almost as if for the joy of having iodine poured in, or hearing the fiz of peroxide mixing with their gore.

"Ah! That is nice!" they murmur, *"umuti muhle sibili!"* (the medicine is good indeed).

Dick had a brief murderous way of plunking half a spoonful of permanganate crystals into an open wound. No need then to tell them to "Hop it, you scoundrel!" or offer a double dose of castor oil to complete the cure. Some men prescribe two tablespoonfuls of paraffin for all complaints. Administration of a large dose of camomile is also favoured by masters—but by natives only once! Naturally Felicia's kinder methods were more popular, and her outdoor clinic was always crowded. Finished at last, she was just washing her hands in her hut when she heard loud shoutings of *"uKosi! uKosi!"* and looking out of the door saw the whole staff cricking necks and waving arms skyward at a great bird sailing overhead.

"The Eagle! . . . the Eagle that killed the hen!" they yelled, and full of excitement, she snatched up her shot gun, a little 20-bore of American make, and rushed into the open.

There he was, sailing insolently across the blue, pretty high as she judged it, and a fairly long shot. But she was lucky enough to put a pellet into his head—clean through the eye—and down he came like a rock. A chorus of ejaculations arose. Every boy on the farm who had not already stopped work did so at once and hastened to the spot. Also Vyner, Patrick Fenn and Buffalo Bill drove up just in time to witness the affair, and Dick suddenly reappeared from nowhere. Quite a crowd! And all full of congratulations at her splendid shot. The flush of victory on her face, she stood looking very lovely, with native boys jabbering all round her.

"What are they saying?" she asked, more to distract attention from herself than for any other reason. Vyner translated vivaciously if not veraciously.

"They cry out 'Ha Ha! This is indeed the daughter of a great chief . . . this one is to be feared for her prowess with the gun as well as for the strong shining of her eyes!'" The other men laughed at this effort.

"You're a kidder, ain't you Padge!" said Dick.

"Trust an Irishman to pitch a pretty story!" commented Buffalo Bill. Fenn said nothing, so, for once, civilly enough Felicia turned to him:

"What *are* they saying? I like to know what goes on in the native mind."

"Something like this," he responded with a dry smile. "'What an unfortunate fluke for the eagle! Pity she can't leave eagles alone! *She* doesn't know what it is to feel hungry that's certain. No more hen suppers for us while she's about, drat the girl!"

Later Felicia came to know that he had probably translated the jabberings fairly truthfully, for natives can be both sardonic and witty among themselves concerning the prowess of their "betters." But at the time, though she joined in the general laughter, she regretted having given him an opportunity to be malicious at her expense. Stella who had added herself unto them, also did her best to take the gilt off the gingerbread by relating that it was unlucky to kill eagles. She hoped (sweetly) that Felicia wouldn't find it so.

"I don't care if I do," was the hardy retort. "I'm jolly proud of my bird, and no one can crab *that*." She gazed admiringly at the big sinister-looking fellow; dark brown in colour, tail white-tipped with dark cross-band; chest and under-feathers white. He measured nearly six feet across the wings. Dick reckoned he must have stood about thirty inches in his stockings. "It's a trophy well worth taking home," he told Felicia, and gave instructions to the boys for a careful skinning and curing.

Meanwhile it was time for 11 o'clock tea. The whole party adjourned to the verandah, and Felicia's little gun having been duly handled and admired, the conversation fell, naturally enough, on shooting. She heard for the first time the Rhodesian maxim that an unloaded gun is about as much

use as a tin whistle, though against this theory of always having your weapon ready for use, there stood a substantial list of Rhodesian accidents. But then,—though a gun is not a gun unless loaded, an accident is always an accident. Sometimes it may be condoned, sometimes explained away, never can it be prevented:—because all accidents contain the irrevocable element of fatality. This is Rhodesian logic with Rhodesian arguments to back it up.

"If you have a rendezvous with death, there's no dodging it," Paget Vyner said with an affectation of originality. A sentiment unanimously agreed to, and Buffalo Bill quoted another well-known epigram:

"We are all sentenced to death, but suffering from an indefinite reprieve."

Scraps of veld wisdom and philosophy were produced, interlarded with reminiscences of gun casualties that all knew about but never tired of discussing: The case of Gordon, mortally wounded in the left breast by a gun he didn't even know was loaded: out motoring with his wife and baby, twenty miles from anywhere, and his wife not able to drive, the poor fellow bled to death in the struggle to get the car back to town.

There was also the case of B——, leaning with both hands on the muzzle of a gun (inexcusable recklessness of course!) His dog jumped against the trigger and it went off, blowing away both his hands. On recovering consciousness the unfortunate B—— managed to get to his feet, and totter along until he met two Mashonas whom he persuaded to support him in the direction of the nearest farm. They obliged, but presently began to evince great interest in the absence of the gun, and the sufferer too weak to appreciate the meaning of their pointed inquiries, told them it was left lying where the accident occurred. Immediately, dropping him, and the rôle of good Samaritan, they made off, and though he eventually had the luck to reach help he never saw either the gun or niggers again. (Natives are for-

bidden by law the possession of firearms but that does not prevent them from getting hold of one whenever they can and concealing it for their own uses.)

Then there was the case of Bert Raylton, the Australian, who brought his Havana band all the way to Rhodesia only to find his last rest in the Salisbury cemetery—mortally wounded by a friend at a Sunday picnic!

There was also the bride who, on her honeymoon somewhere up the Zambesi, fired, (fortunately not with fatal results) at her husband. Said she thought he was a wild beast!

"Rather ambiguous that!" remarked Buffalo Bill with a laugh.

"Dunno about beast, but he must have been a fool, to go for a walk and come stealing back to his camp by moonlight," commented Vyner.

"A hero as well as a fool," said Dick derisively, "Any man is, who goes out shooting with a woman."

He said it in evident jest, but Stella chose to take offence.

"Fools with guns are masculine as often as feminine," she contended warmly. "What about George Dana who killed his partner in mistake for a buck? And Jimmy Manton who, when a leopard attacked his friend, fired killing the friend while the leopard loped off scot free?"

"Yes, and what about Stanniland?" Patrick Fenn abetted her, "waggling his gun about, thinking it wasn't loaded and shooting his own foot off."

"And Teddy King's great last words—'Let's see if this revolver's loaded?' "

"I grant you those cases, and a whole lot more," grinned Dick, "and I know it is ungallant, but my experience is that at a shoot most women are a menace and a danger. I know that *I* always feel a stirring of the scalp when one of them is in my vicinity."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dick," Paget Vyner rebuked, "and your wife such a crackerjack with a gun!"

"Yes, Stella's one of the carefullest shots I know . . . though by Jove! Shonnie that hit of yours just now takes some beating. . . ."

"Listen!" Stella interrupted, "Cars coming through the drift!" There was an instant's silence and then sure enough, above the river bank, a car came into sight, followed by two more.

"Visitors . . . in loads! Good-bye . . . eee!" Dick straightway made a bolt for it. The rest rising, gazed uneasily at the approaching invaders, who might of course be people it would be nice to see, but might on the other hand be bores of the first grade. Paget Vyner with field-glasses pronounced doomfully that ten persons were scattered in the three vehicles, and Stella turned dramatically upon Felicia.

"No cake in the house! And Kowunder can't even make scones with a cut thumb!"

"There's no butter either," rejoined Felicia, "at least not more than a few ounces. You forgot to order it yesterday." It gave her no pain to remind Stella of this, nor to add with a smile, "And I'm sorry, but Jim says the cats got at the cream during the night!"

Mrs. Cardross turned lovely pathetic eyes on the two men: "*Who* would leave England to buy a farm in Rhodesia?"

"Why worry?" said Fenn. "People should bring their own skoff with them when they travel in regiments."

"Yes," agreed Vyner, "pretty cool I call it, invading a farm without notice and expecting to be fed! Turn them on the mealie patch—I see you've got quite a few cobs left."

Which was all very well, but something had to be done and Felicia could see that Stella expected her to do it, spite of the fact that the provision shortage lay at her own door. To beat up Pagg was the only hope, though of course it meant another bribe; a hat this time ("Oh, Miss Shonnie . . . you are so generous reely . . . I reely couldn't!" grabbing it greedily however and dodging off with it to her hut). In the result a good-sized mound of exquisite sandwiches was

produced out of no more material than one loaf of bread, three hard-boiled eggs, the remnants of an over-night salad and scrapings from an ancient pot of Gentleman's Relish. Certainly when it came to organising the commissariat Pagg was a female Moses.

The fare indeed proved more distinguished than the guests who turned out to be a party of folk from Que-Que ("*Que-Que,*[1] where the queer people come from!" murmured Vyner in Felicia's ear). They professed to be going for a two days' picnic up Poinsettia Pass but looked as though with very little encouragement they might picnic at Manana instead.

There was Monkey Mason, a plump, placid, consequential little man covered with specks. He hied originally from Craddock in the Free State, was not ashamed to say so, and prefaced most of his remarks with the Cape-colonial ejaculation "Man!"

"*Man!* But it's hot to-day, *Ja vot!*"

"*Man!* But my tobacco crop is in fine shape I can tell you!"

"Man! You should see my new bull . . . knocks out every other bull in the country!"

Mrs. "Monkey" with bright little boot-button eyes, and a propitiating manner, always used the name of the person she was addressing as often as she could.

"Oh yes, Mrs. Cardross, but what I say, Mrs. Cardross, is . . ."

"Yes, but Colonel Vyner, you are very naughty, Colonel Vyner . . ."

There was also Dr. Betson and his wife; he fat, heavy and meditative as an ox, she a tiny four-foot-nothing-woman who wrote poetry, and had made such subjects as "The reddening Mopani leaves," and "Springtide on the Rhodesian hills" peculiarly her own. From her pen many a sonnet had winged its welcoming way to visiting Administrators and Governors. Even Judges of the Assizes were not safe from

[1] Pronounced Kwek-quee.

her. But Rhodesia has an ungrateful heart and a viperous tongue. Instead of being proud of owning a poetess, they mocked this worthy pair behind their backs, dubbing them the Excrescence and the Pimple.

Another learned-looking "Doctor" of the party turned out to be a dentist. He told Felicia that he had graduated in the University of Baltimore and had a "deeploma" signed by the President, Vice-presidents and Patrons of that famous institution hanging on his surgery walls in Que-Que,—no doubt to alleviate the sufferings of his patients! He was a tall upstanding man, elastic of tread, with lofty brow, steel-grey eyes, and a jaw firm as the blocks that form the Pyramids. Distressing to hear, when he turned away to speak of his "deeploma" to someone else, that this pale intellectual was "the sloppiest drunk in Rhodesia." It was Buffalo Bill who confided this biographical detail to her, with the supplemental information: that tho' he had broken the one-day record for beer in the Dorp, gin was his great standby—gin and tonic!

His wife (they were all accompanied by their wives —very eccentric behaviour for Rhodesia!) was a thin bird-like creature whose habit of besprinkling her conversation with such expressions as *Vraiment? Pas possible? tout à fait* and *pas du tout* was doubtless very impressive to those who did not know French. She also insisted upon referring to the Countess as the *Comptesse*. In fact it had evidently been settled beforehand that this was the correct designation of that noble lady. It presently transpired that all had come in the hope of meeting her.

There was a generally chop-fallen air about them when told that she was confined to her room.

Nevertheless they lingered on. Even after the mound of sandwiches had disappeared, together with several pots of tea and the major portion of a bottle of whisky they still stuck. Stella, pale with apprehension, made secret signals to Patrick Fenn which he interpreted as an order to start the gramophone, and put on two cracked records, one after

the other, in the hope of harrying them into flight. But they seemed to like it. He then next tortured them with "Parted," under cover of which Stella held an emergency meeting with Vyner in the back verandah, returning to murmur to Felicia that she had deputed him to lure the party to Tagati with a promise to show them over the mine.

"He can easily shunt them afterwards, or, if they insist on staying, there is at least plenty of food there and a cook to cook it too." All this with the syrupy strains of "Parted" going at full-speed, and Pat Fenn grinning with cheerful enjoyment of Hubert Eisdell's lucious accents:

"How can I live without you?
How can I let you go?"

"I shall have to accompany them of course, to save my face," whispered Stella, adding aloud. "You won't mind seeing that cousin Letty gets a proper lunch sent in to her, will you, Shonnie?"

"Of course not—if there's anything to send!"

"And pacifying Dick?"

"Oh as to that, Stella . . ." but Hubert Eisdell triumphantly drowned all protest:

"*You* that I love so well
You that I worship so"

At any rate the plan worked, as Stella's plans had a way of doing, and the party took itself off, accompanied by Stella, Vyner and Fenn. Buffalo Bill had already faded away in his car, and Felicia marooned alone on the stoep, slightly forlorn felt rather like Ariadne on her rock, watching mermaids and mer-men frisk off to more interesting diversions! Not that she envied Stella the society of the Que-Que crowd, but she wouldn't have minded visiting Tagati, only naturally no one had suggested it after Stella's careful instructions as to the Countess and Dick!

However there it was. For once in a way she appeared instead of leaving to have got left! On top of a bad night a dull noon loomed before her. Much as she liked Dick he was not exactly exciting company, but it was a blessing at least that old Letty kept her bed.

It seemed however that she was not to be entirely deserted, for, just as she had taken down Dick's "Oxford Book of English Prose," and begun to dip into it, who should walk back into the scene but Patrick Fenn! He explained that he had got out at the Drift and come back to fetch his stick. Why anyone driving in a car should need a stick was not for Felicia's brain to fathom, and she implied as much, while indicating disdainfully the rough knob-kerry in question, lying under a chair.

"Never go anywhere without my stick," he remarked, retrieving it gravely.

"Why?" she coldly inquired, "Are you lame?"

"Yes, I am rather now you mention it," he replied with what she considered an impudent grin, and calmly seated himself. "So perhaps you won't mind my resting a bit?"

"Surely you have your luncheon party to attend to?"

"How can I live without them
How can I let them go?"

He hummed softly to himself, "Besides I should hate to spoil Padge's splendour as host *solitaire*. He does so enjoy himself ladling out drinks and pretty remarks."

Felicia took up the cudgels at once for Vyner.

"Everyone enjoys doing what they can do well," she said warmly. "As for the rest of us we should try not to be spiteful." He only laughed at this.

"You think I'm jealous of Vyner?"

She read a passage of English prose instead of answering. After waiting a bit he added off his own bat, "and you're quite right, I am. But not for what you think I am."

Felicia wrinkled her brow loftily:

"That's a very involved sentence. I wonder what it means? At least I *should* wonder if it interested me to know. For improvement of your general style let me recommend this book of English prose." He reached out for it at once, continuing to smile in a provoking manner, but she neither took her hands nor her eyes from it, merely remarking coldly, "I daresay Dick will lend it to you."

On that—as is often the case with the mention of a name—the owner of that particular one walked in, very cross and thirsty.

"Has that crew gone? Thank the Lord for that anyway, but I don't suppose there's a piece of whisky left, if Betson's been here. My God, that feller can mop it up! Where's Stella?"

While he was draining the bottle of the few poor "pieces" overlooked by the specialist from Baltimore, they explained the situation.

"Crimes of Paris! Well, thank God for Tagati anyway! As for *our* lunch I suppose we've got to fish for it! But anything's better than being in that 'jam.' I ought to slip down to the river first, though, to see about the calf the leopard got last night. The cattle have found the carcass and been kicking up a devil of a shine ever since. Want to come and see cattle kicking up a shindy, Shonnie?"

"Rather!" she seized her hat, determined not to be left alone with Fenn again. "Shall I bring a gun?"

"Not much good I'm afraid. The brute has cleared off, and will lie low for a bit now, or possibly give someone else a call." Fenn came, too, and all three went out into the sunshine, over the lands and through the Drift. The spot where the tragedy had occurred was off the beaten track, and long before they reached it they could hear the bellowing of the cattle. It appeared that on coming for a morning drink at the river one of the herd had smelled the dead calf, gone over to inspect, and sent out a sort of S. O. S. Instantly from all parts had come rushing oxen, bulls, cows—

even quite baby calves—and there they were still, pawing the ground round the carcass, scattering earth, slashing their tails, some of them rolling as if in an agony of grief, others on their knees with necks outstretched slithering along the ground, all ceaselessly, tempestuously, bellowing. It was a blood-curdling exhibition of mingled fear and rage, with something terribly moving and intelligent in the performance, and Felicia for one felt greatly relieved when Dick roared at the boys to break up the herd. When at last it had been driven off, and they could hear themselves speak, they approached the body of the dead calf—a fine young red bull with its throat torn out. The leopard had simply drained it of its blood, and it was during that process that Felicia had heard those heartrending cries.

Fenn recommended poisoning the carcass, on the chance of the marauder coming back to finish it, but the boys, most of whom understood English, did not seem particularly charmed with the idea, and, watching them, Felicia could not help applying Fenn's own translation of their remarks when she had shot the eagle:

"Easy to see *he's* never been hungry!"

Yet,—could they possibly want that blood-drained carcass to eat? Dick, laughing at her inquiry, echoed it derisively to the waiting boys. They did not assent, nor yet deny, merely they preferred a certain few modest and reasonable statements, which were punctuated by sardonic and ribald comment from the two white men, thus:

Timkombo (the head herdsman): "It is unlikely that the *skelem* will return to eat the meat. He or she (probably he) is simply one of those 'rovers' that go round killing and sucking blood . . ."

M'Kiwa (his first aide-de-camp): "Yes, Inkos, that is so. He will do the same on the next farm, and then the next. Though he may wait on this farm until he can isolate another calf."

Dick: "You ain't optimists, are you?"

Fenn: "Nor altruists, I don't think!"

Timkombo: "Why, then, should the Inkos waste perfectly good poison . . . ? Especially as the dogs will be more likely to consume it than the *skelem*. What a pity (sadly) if the Inkos's favourite dog Bingo is poisoned!"

Dick: "A lot you'd care, you blackguard!"

Fritty (most of the house boys had mysteriously arrived on the scene), with a dolorous expression: "Or the Inkosikaas's little long flat dogs called Silly-Hams . . ."

Dick (pleasantly): "You shut up, you silly ass, you!"

Timkombo: "Of course, if the Inkos decide to poison, it does not matter to us. But since the Inkos asks for our opinion we submit that the best plan is to let us cart away the corpse . . . for burial, of course . . ."

Fenn: "They'll cart it away all right . . . but not to any *cemetery* for dead cows!"

Benny (a second aide-de-camp): "To leave it on the veld would be simply asking for trouble. Inviting every other *skelem* in the country to come and feed—jackals, hyenas, leopard . . ."

Fenn: "The whole veverrine tribe in fact . . ."

Timkombo: "And flocks of stinking asvogels, while if the Inkos permits us to remove the carcass . . . for burial of course . . . to-night we will send word to all the kraals for boys and dogs to come out early to-morrow and hunt the *skelem.*"

"Splendid fellows!" applauded Dick sarcastically. *"So* disinterested!" But at last he gave the desired permission, and in the twinkling of an eye they all had their knives out and were hacking into the carcass—the better to facilitate transport to the burying place of course!

"They'll bury it, but not in the earth," laughed Fenn. "By Jove, won't there be a jamboree in your compound to-night, Dick."

They left them to it, and returned homewards, but on getting there found that even those house-boys not attend-

ing the calf-obsequies had romped off somewhere on business of their own. Probably they were at the compound enjoying *poulet-en-casserole,* or holding a joyful indaba in anticipation of *blanquette-de-veau.* At any rate, it was for Felicia to provide lunch for the party, which she managed by ransacking the pantry, opening sardines and bully beef, and concocting a salad out of nothing at all. Fortunately Pagg had already attended to the wants of the Countess.

Dick of course had pressed Fenn to remain, and certainly that "strong silent man" could be sufficiently entertaining when he chose. Felicia considered that his manners were more agreeable *á trois* than *á deux,* and she had to suppose it was because of affection for Dick that he unbent himself. Considering how jolly and delightful he was, it seemed strange that he and she could never be together without flinging barbs at each other. But she imputed the fault entirely to him. If a man went out of his way to show a decided antipathy she surely had a right to make him bite the dust upon every possible occasion. With Dick as audience, however, they called a truce for once.

After lunch, as the last of the bread had disappeared down their throats and there was no cook to make any more, or any flour wherewith to make it, Felicia asked Dick what he thought was the answer? He replied that Stella would probably forget to borrow any at the mine, and it would not be a bad line for Pat and her to take the car over to Tagati. She could then bring back Stella and the borrowed bread. He couldn't go himself, as it was cattle-dipping day. Besides, he had to attend to some preparations for tobacco-seed beds.

Fenn and Felicia looked at each other, exchanging challenges. The truce was up, as anyone could see by the set of his lips and the gleam in her eye. Said Fenn, evidently not liking the look of things:

"There's no need to trouble Miss Lissell. I can easily run back Mrs. Cardross with the bread."

Which determined Felicia all the more to go, if only to annoy him. She addressed herself to Dick:

"Stella wouldn't want that, do you think, Dick? Running these mine-men backwards and forwards, when they want to be busy pulling nuggets out of the earth." She smiled at Fenn brilliantly but without kindness, hoping he enjoyed being lumped in under "mine men." But he was tough as nails. You couldn't annoy the brute!

"It's not my day for getting out the nuggets," he declared, and had the cheek to laugh as if she had said something ridiculous. Then coolly addressing himself to Dick, "Really, old man, I should enjoy running Mrs. Cardross back."

"I daresay you would," was Felicia's silent comment, "but your luck is out." Aloud she said thoughtfully: "She's sure to be tired, and with me she wouldn't be obliged to talk. Women understand each other" (heaven forgive me, she added inwardly).

"She looked as fresh as paint when she went off," asserted Fenn.

"Yes, but we've all had an exciting day, haven't we? Even I . . ." she flicked her fingers lightly but with a faint suggestion of fatigue, across her brow—"Even *I* don't want to talk, but I should enjoy a drive to blow away my headache."

That settled him. He could not repudiate the just demands of her health (hurrah), nor yet hug any delusion that she yearned for the charm of his conversation. As for Dick, he was all solicitude.

"*Of course* you ought to go, Shonnie. You've been scurrying round since dawn and must be a dead duck. The blow will do you all the good in the world."

She had won! Light-foot she sped to her hut, and slid into the darlingest little white kasha motor-coat (for this was still August and chillyish) as straight up and down as a die except where it curved over her curves, and with cuffs and a belt of soft pale green leather. As for her headache,

it disappeared instantly when popped into her most captivating hat, a bluey-green inspiration of Reboux's coming down well over the brows, and giving her eyes the mysterious allure of those bluey-green turquoises sometimes seen in very old jewelry. And all she could say was, that if she didn't look like a spray of winter plum, no one ever would. She'd larn him!

He was waiting beside the car, mad as a wild cat, no doubt, but keeping up a pretence of perfect serenity.

"Will you drive?" he asked, civilly enough.

"Yes, please," she hopped in briskly, pleased with this further opportunity of "larning" him, and silently he seated himself beside her. At the back was Dick's car-boy, Harrods.

She loved whirling down the drift as if bent on destruction with the devil at her heels. She had already tried it with the de Wilton's Bean, the Amerys' Overland, and every other vehicle she'd had the chance of handling. As a driver she possessed dash, and could take a car within half a foot of its doom, pulling it up on its haunches at the fifty-ninth second in a fashion to stir the marrow in the bones of the most phlegmatic. Her manipulation of her own little two-seater De-Lage at home had often been known to drag gurgling sounds, perhaps of admiration and perhaps not, from the lips of London policemen. It is not always easy, however, to find passengers who really appreciate that type of thrill. A side glance at Fenn showed him perfectly composed so far, but her experience was, that though men will take tremendous risks themselves at the wheel, they do not find it so pleasant to sit still and watch some one else do so, especially a woman. She decided in this also to be good for Mr. Patrick Fenn's education.

She had forgotten, however, that this was not her beautiful little De-Lage—subtle and sensitive as an Arab steed, with brakes she could rely on like her own eye—but Dick's outrageous old crock of a submarine. They flew down the

Drift all right, at fifty miles an hour, and with the din of a brakeless pantechnicon full of empty milk cans; but they omitted to fly out on the other side. The Underseas sat down in the middle of the empty river-bed, crouched there like a beast that had overeaten itself (on empty cans), and did not intend to budge until appetite returned!

Very bright of eye, and with a pink spot in each cheek, the driver wrenched at the wheel, waggled every gadget she could find, till her arms ached, and kicked and racked at the gear. All no good. Once the beastly thing ran a little way up the bank, then suddenly stopped dead and slumped back again. With a bang that jarred every tooth in their heads, the wretched contraption resettled to her position in the river-bed. Meanwhile the man Fenn sat smoking a cigarette and looking carelessly at ease. The brute evidently hadn't a nerve in his body, thought Felicia, and suddenly remembered the front stall he had occupied at the battle of Jutland. Which didn't make her feel any the happier.

"What a good thing the wet season hasn't begun," was all Captain Fenn said. Annoyed by the irrelevance of such a remark while they sat there at an absolute dead-end, she was fool enough to ask, why?

"We should be washed away," he pleasantly replied. "The river tears down here at a good many miles an hour and twelve feet high. Our name would be River Mud."

This information neither improved the situation nor soothed her troubled breast. She regarded him with marked frigidity.

"Any petrol in the tank, I wonder?" was his next idle remark.

"Surely you might have ascertained that before we left!" she answered shortly.

"Yes, I suppose I should, instead of taking the owner's word for it. Never take anyone's word about the petrol." He got out leisurely and had a look for himself.

"Just enough to carry us through! Trouble must be

somewhere else. Hi! You, Harrods! Bring out the crank-starter."

Harrods became very busy. So did Felicia. But all to no purpose. Indeed by now, remembering her first experience of this vile Tank, her heart had sunk into her boots.

"Dick is perfectly correct in calling it a self-starter," mused Fenn, methodically going over the car's anatomy, opening the bonnet, inspecting the carburetor, and taking out and cleaning each sparking-plug in turn. "No one else seems to be able to persuade it to proceed!"

At the end of his activities he could suggest no better solution than that the miserable bus perhaps needed a greater amount of muscular vigour at the propelling gear than its present driver was able to supply. With as good a grace as she could muster Felicia handed over, and vacated, but felt a thrill of triumph when in spite of the change and enormous acrobatic feats with the crank on the part of Harrods, they still remained stationary. Once more Fenn descended, and reopened the bonnet. This time he turned his attention to the magneto.

"Might have guessed that!" he muttered, and having at last found the cause of the trouble, adjusted it with a small screw-driver from his pocket. Then closing the magneto with a click, the bonnet with a bang, Harrods at the crank, and himself back in the driving seat, they got started at last, and were presently purring laboriously up the bank. A very different exodus from the one Felicia had planned!

He did not offer her the wheel again, and she did not want it either. In fact, she had to acknowledge to herself that it was only thanks to him that they emerged at all, and putting her mortification into her pocket, and a surprising amount of meekness into her voice, she enquired as to the cause of the trouble.

"Quite a simple thing, really, that I ought to have thought of at first," he said apologetically. "Just the pivot on which

the 'make and break' works. It sometimes sticks, especially in old cars. But it can happen even in the best, and will hold you up pretty thoroughly if you haven't a small screw-driver and spanner on you. You should carry one."

Still meek she promised so to do, and there was peace between them for the residue of the drive.

. . . . . .

Tagati, with its scattered buildings and outworks, lay serene in the afternoon sunshine. From the Mine House came no sound or sign. Only Fenn's two dogs, Opera (out of Comedy), a black Spanish pointer, and Bang, a setter, came leaping and bounding out to greet their master. Then a house-boy suddenly appeared from the back of nowhere, and being questioned by Fenn, answered with a pointing gesture and reply: "Laapa Pointchee Pass." Mangled by native pronunciation, this sounded to Felicia like the name of a place about two miles distant, called Poinsettia Pass, where the partners had bought land and just finished the building of a marvellous house.

But Fenn, without elucidating, waved the boy aside, giving a brief order for tea in the dining room. Tea appealed to Felicia and she made haste to descend from the car.

"Where are the others, though? I hope we shan't run into the queer people from Que-Que again?"

"No. My boy says they left about half an hour ago."

"And Stella?"

"Oh, she and Vyner are about somewhere," he said carelessly. "They'll join us presently, I expect, if not we'll look for them after we've had a cup of tea."

She followed him up the steps into the big cool general room, where she had already been more than once, though never beyond any other door than that, just passed through. One of these doors led into a smaller room full of books, that was Fenn's special sanctum. Stella often marched into it with a proprietary air, and emerged carrying an armful of

the latest publications, but Felicia had never penetrated there, and told herself disdainfully that she did not want to, either.

Yet, when tea having been consumed pleasantly enough beneath the freshly-unfurled flag of truce, Fenn asked if she would care to have a look at his books, it was not disdain but eagerness that she carefully camouflaged under an air of indifference.

Clearly a sailor's room. Everything very plain, simple and ship-shape. For furniture, only a writing table on which stood a Corona typewriter, and a couple of deep chairs. The walls lined from floor almost to ceiling with books. In Rhodesia anyone who values books and keeps them just on open shelves must expect the worst from white ant, fish-moth, and cockroach; but these were safely housed in dark oak cases with sliding panels of glass, though they certainly did not give the impression of being for ornament only, for many of them were well-worn, even battered.

"What a lovely lot of books!" she cried and skimmed from case to case, touching old friends, reading titles, taking out one volume after another with exclamations of delight. For if it is pleasant to imagine one's taste eclectic, something a little apart from, and perhaps slightly *above* the taste of most people it is even more wonderful to find it most perfectly shared. And when she fully realised that in the space of this room of about twelve-by-fifteen-feet there was almost every volume of poetry, travel, philosophy, biography, romance (even down to French and modern fiction) that she had loved as a child, cared for as a girl, or, as a woman, still intended to read, her heart kindled to Patrick Fenn, and she saw him with new eyes. It is such a satisfaction to talk over the books you care for with someone who cares for them, too! To share your joy in a poem, a story, a style, a phrase, an ideal. There is scarcely any better basis for friendship. Of course this man and she, with such a bond between them, must bury the hatchet. They understood

each other! She turned towards him with a lovely light in her eyes, her hands making a little gesture that included both him and his books, drawing them into the circle of a warm friendliness.

"It is absurd of us not to be friends," she said. "We love the same books."

He was leaning in the doorway, a cigarette between his fingers, apparently watching her, yet, with that far gaze of his going through and past her to some distant place beyond. The impersonal quality of the steadfast gaze chilled her a little, thwarting her warm impulse and changing it to a childlike petulance. Her mind turned vexedly to the thought of another man less likely to disregard the invitation of her reached-out hand. Paget Vyner would not be so insensitive! If this were *his* library, how welcome she would be to browse and borrow to her heart's content! Then she found to her surprise that Patrick Fenn leaning there so idly was answering that part at least of her remarks that referred to his library.

"Yes," he said slowly, "books can mean a lot. In the desert, and on the sea they will sometimes save a man's heart from breaking quite in two."

There was no emotion in his voice. It had the quiet level that boys begin to cultivate from the day they learn the hard rule that emotion is not for them, that "only girls show feeling, only girls cry!" that *they* being males, must at whatever cost, smother feeling and tears for ever out of sight. Startled by his words, she looked straight into his eyes, and found them, as usual, cool and blue as the sea. But somehow, in that moment she realised, what dimly she had felt all along that Patrick Fenn not only had a heart that could be broken in two, but had known such depths of suffering as only a nature of fine calibre could plumb. Surprised and moved, as much by her own feelings as by this discovery, she withdrew her glance from his and turned quickly to the shelves again. Seeing "Ulysses" just before her, she touched it

with her finger and asked what he thought of it. It was his turn to stare in something like astonishment, but when she told him calmly and with a little amused smile that she read everything that came her way and would not dream of letting so remarkable an author as James Joyce escape her attention, he said thoughtfully:

"Joyce is a prince of psychologists, if that's any good. But I had to read his 'Portrait of the Author as a Young Man' before I could form a clear opinion of him, or of 'Ulysses.' *Then* I knew him to be most blasphemous, scurrilous, lecherous, piercingly cruel, despairing, and great." After a moment's pause he added, "And the good God have compassion on all such!"

"You are a Catholic, aren't you?" said Felicia gently and not really irrelevantly, for she was thinking how outraged any Catholic ought to be at the profanity of Joyce's work, his deliberate spewing upon sacred phrases and things.

"Yes . . . and of course that blasphemous, anti-religious stuff of his is horrible, but there's no use attaching too much importance to it. It is the dirt-throwing, the spite, of a bad child, but a cruelly hurt child. Do you remember that passage in 'The Portrait' when Stephen Dedalus picks the lice out of his head, and reflects on all they imply of the sordid hopelessness of his life?"

"Yes, I remember. It is heart-wringing . . . but I remember too the strangly lovely poem that came out of that same lousy head" . . . she murmured softly:

> "Are you not weary of ardent ways?
> Tell no more of enchanted days."

"In reality the poem must have been written much later. At the time there was only the horror of unescapable environment; the bitterness of life—so much more terrible to a youngster than the bitterness of death!"

"How well you understand," she looked at him wonderingly.

"I've been through it," he said quietly. "I've had lice in my head, filthy clothes on an unwashed body, an environment that didn't hold a ray of hope."

Her heart gave a twist of pain. She didn't know what to say. She looked into his inflexible eyes, then once more turned away, her own full of tears, whilst he, walking over to the writing table, struck a match, lighting at last the cigarette he had been holding in his hand.

What a picture, etched boldly in black, he had left with her of his boyhood! Lonely, unhappy, often unwashed, hungry! What tragedy such words could cover! All boys are unhappy. A wise old man had once told her this. Even the loved ones in good homes had their sick miseries of body and soul, their secret despairs that could not be confided to the best of parents. The finer a boy's calibre the worse for him. They should be compounded of brass and iron (he had said) of cruelty and callousness, to come through the hell of adolescence and reach manhood safely! There was a nun, too, in a convent in the East, who had told Felicia that she offered up every Mass of her life for boys . . . their delivery from the miseries they were subjected to—the disappointments, disenchantments, mishandling, sneers, misunderstandings, woundings, mockeries, and brutalities of the world!

How terrible, realising these things, to think that one might have a son some day to go through it all! She gave another swift glance at Fenn, smoking and staring through the open window. It must have been hard work to grow from a ragged vagabond into that strong self-contained man! Where had he learned his lesson of control? On the sea perhaps . . . "Mother and lover of men . . . the Sea!"

How much she had learned of him in the little space of an afternoon! The thought recalled her to the present and she glanced at her watch, exclaiming:

"We've been here nearly two hours! Where *can* Stella be!"

"Perhaps we'd better go and have a look round." His suggestion contained no particular eagerness, but the moment for action had evidently arrived! They passed out into the late afternoon, and proceeded a little way from the back of the house towards the vicinity of the Shaft and Mill. Round about were scattered various buildings: a workshop; some offices; huts for the occupation of the several white men engaged on the mine; and slightly apart, but quite near enough for its inhabitants to be visible, lay the compound where those boys not "on shift" were cooking, washing, or sitting complacently in the dying sunshine.

Outside the workshop, two white men were occupying themselves; one shaping a piece of native timber; the other sandpapering something that looked like a small valve. Fenn paused and introduced them to Felicia, because on most Rhodesian mines Jack is as good as his master, and also because Patrick Fenn practised socialistic manners,—no doubt to put greater contrast between himself and such "gentlemen" as Amery!

"This," he said, indicating the cleaner of the valve, "is Mr. Campbell, our fitter."

"No—only a poor old pump doctor," repudiated Mr. Campbell modestly.

"How do you do, Mr. Campbell?" Felicia shook hands with him.

"Quite well, thank you, Miss." The response was both earnest and affable.

"And this" (indicating the manipulator of the adze) "is Mr. Bristowe, our carpenter."

"And a damned bad carpenter at that," said Mr. Bristowe, also modest.

"How do you do, Mr. Bristowe?" Another handshake.

"Quite well, I thank you, Miss."

Campbell had a large, flat face on which was a large flat nose and a large flat smile: all good-natured. Bristowe, a little fellow, with a hook nose and a Captain-kettle beard,

wore the first waistcoat Felicia had so far seen in Rhodesia, also across his middle a watch-chain with a strange metal device hanging from it. Fenn inquired the whereabouts of Colonel Vyner, but got no information worth so calling. Their answers, though perfectly amiable, were vague, even, it might be, slightly evasive. As amiability seemed to be the order of the day, and she was smoking, Felicia offered her cigarette case to Mr. Campbell, whom she judged by the yellowing stain on his otherwise white moustache to be a tobacco addict of some sort; but was not prepared to see him eject a plug from his mouth (politely turning away for the act) before accepting one of her special Egyptians. Mr. Bristowe, however, courteously refused. He never smoked, he said firmly: he had promised his mother he never would. He never chewed either: another promise to his mother.

"It's a pity he didn't promise his mother never to drink," said Patrick Fenn when they were out of earshot, "for he's usually as drunk as a fish."

"An odd pair," commented Felicia.

"Odd's one word, but there are various others that Vyner and I apply to them. They are the trial of our lives. Never made a truer statement, either of them, than when they claimed to be bad at their jobs. It wasn't modesty either, but a form of overwhelming pride. Campbell really thinks he's good enough to run the biggest engineering works in the country, while Bristowe fancies himself a master architect at least.

"Bristowe's Irish, of course?"

"Yes. That medal he wears on his watch-chain is a Fenian emblem of sorts, the sole reason for wearing a waistcoat, being to display and produce it more easily when he wants to start a row, which is very frequently."

"Really rather a terrible pair then. Why do you keep them?"

"Well, they possess certain points. Campbell is good-natured, and devoted at least to his collie dog, which is some-

thing. Bristowe in that small and fragile frame can be cantankerous, vicious, bitter and scornful, merry, witty, and bubbling over with good-nature. On a Rhodesian mine there's a use for everything."

"They haven't been useful enough to tell us where Stella and Colonel Vyner are, however, and it's nearly five o'clock."

"We'll just try Goodreef at the Mill, shall we? He's a real old game bird. 'Missing-reef' he's called in the mining world because he's got so much of his anatomy missing—lost it in accidents—but he's proved a Lucky-reef to us. It was his hand that led us here. You've heard the story, I expect?"

"Yes, but my version said you'd run across the mine quite by accident?"

"Not exactly. Vyner and I met an old prospector going out of the country as we came in, and he advised us to take an option on Tagati. We did so in our joint names, but we couldn't help thinking that if the fellow had been right he wouldn't have left it, so we tried a lot of other properties first with no substantial luck, except that at one of them, the 'Golly-wog,' we tumbled across old Goodreef. His name seemed lucky and I liked his spirit, so I offered him a permanent job with us, and when the 'Golly-wog' turned out N. G. and we were getting pretty low in funds we came over here as a last hope. A lot of work had been done by the last owners—Amery's brother and his partner, who, after months of shaft-sinking and cross-cutting, with never a sign of the reef had got discouraged and chucked it. They had dropped a lot of money over it, and such was their disgust when quitting that they didn't even think it worth while to blast the last round of holes in the face of a cross-cut from a shaft that Amery had had a special fancy to sink. It was a 'dud' property, they decided, and not worth another pen'orth of dynamite. Poor devils, had they known it, those last holes were actually *in* the reef, and if they'd only blasted that day

instead of clearing out they'd have tumbled on to what has proved to be one of the richest little mines in Rhodesia. Hard luck, wasn't it?"

"No wonder Felix the Cat doesn't love you! For I suppose he would have shared in his brother's prosperity?"

"As a matter of fact Felix had money in the venture, and when I remember that I feel it ought to make me more tolerant towards him . . . but that's another story. Vyner and I were very nearly in the same cart. We sat here for four and a half months, sinking and prospecting *anywhere,* but in the right spot, and we too were on the point of chucking it in disgust,—in fact the boys were packing our 'dunnage' for a move, both of us pretty down in the mouth, when old Goodreef suggested having a look down Fred Amery's shaft, off the old working. We went out of morbid curiosity more than anything else, for we had long before decided that if there'd been anything there, Amery, who is an experienced mining man, would have found it. But when we saw the holes they'd left, drilled all ready for the dynamite and Goodreef suggested putting in a charge and firing them, we thought we would, just to give ourselves a send-off. I'll never forget the moment when the boy who went down after the 'blast' brought back a bit of reef absolutely smothered in gold. I sent up a *Laus Deo* and a few *Ave Marias* I can tell you!"

He said the last sentence with such simplicity and sincerity that Felicia dared not even smile until she saw that he was smiling, too. "Here we are at the mill. Goodreef will be scraping the plate to get the day's toll. You'd like to see that, wouldn't you?"

"Do you mean the takings of gold?"

"Yes. Amalgam we call it. There's a lot of quick-silver mixed with it until after it has been 'retorted'—a later process."

"I'd love to. I've never seen a mine at work before."

They went into the mill, a tall wood-and-iron building with two five-stamp batteries in the middle of it, and two long tables, at one of which a one-armed man stood scraping the surface with a sort of scalpel, assisted at the other side of the table by a bright-looking native. Fenn explained that this was the process of "scraping the plate," the table being covered with copper plate to which quick-silver had been applied to catch the gold. Of the famous Goodreef it was immediately evident that he hailed from Yorkshire, for his accent was as broad as the moors of his country. Reasons for his nickname were also pretty evident, or, to be strictly accurate, *non-evident,* in the absence of his left arm and ear, all his teeth, and most of his hair. Nevertheless he seemed very much "all there." A medium-sized man with twinkling brown eyes full of intelligence, and a nuggety sort of bright-coloured nose.

At Fenn's suggestion he explained to Felicia the gentle art of catching gold.

"Coom ova 'ere lass and I'll shaw tha'," was the intriguing form of his invitation, and having once had a Yorkshire "Nanny," she was quite conversant with the accent, as well as with the intimate fashion of address practised by the simple folk of that county, so could appreciate as well as understand the invitation. She was forthwith "shawn" how the amalgam must be "squeezed" when caught, by placing the "stuff," now of the consistency of putty, into a piece of chamois-leather, and wringing and squeezing it, until it became firm, finally emerging from the process in a solid, hard lump.

"It's like a huge cricket ball!" she exclaimed, fascinated by the thought that this globe of electrical whiteness represented that "virgin gold" for which men would dig and slave, often lie, and sometimes die.

"Ay! But you ba's not what we lake at cricket wi' i' Yorksha!" said the old fellow with the humorous snort that was one of his mannerisms—others being to waggle and

gesticulate perpetually with the stump of the missing arm, and emphasise all remarks by a blow on the table with his remaining fist.

"It weighs the earth!" Felicia exclaimed laughing, for when Fenn put the ball into her two hands they wavered under the load.

"No, only about four and a half pounds," he answered, "that's the usual scrape." But the lump turned the scale at five pounds!

"Tha's brot us luk, lass," said Mr. Goodreef flatteringly, "T'ighest scrape we 'vad t'month."

"How much does that mean in money?" she enquired, feeling the gleam and glamour of gold seizing her soul. The canny old man looked at her knowingly.

"Ah! Tha's gotten t'gold faver, lass!"—at which both she and Patrick Fenn burst out laughing.

"Fine gold is valued at four pounds and tenpence half-penny (twenty-one dollars) an ounce," he said. "After the war, when gold was at a premium, it went as high as six pounds, but now it's nearly normal again. So our usual scrape of four and a half pounds per shift is worth roughly one hundred and twenty-eight pounds—the amalgam here runs fifty per cent gold."

"And you make all that daily?" she cried, scandalised.

"Tha's not countin' t'neet shift," gleefully interposed the Missing-reef. "T'ame sum from t'neet's scrapings brings it oop t' two hundred and fifty-six pounds for t' twenty-four hours."

"Take me away . . . I can't bearrrrr it!" she commanded Fenn, and turned laughing to the door. Then once more remembered Stella.

"Oh, Mr. Goodreef, we *really* came to ask you where Colonel Vyner and Mrs. Cardross have got to?"

"Reckon th'll be in t'usual place," he said shortly, then half turned to Patrick Fenn. "Did na' boy gie y't'message that they . . . ?" he broke off, something he saw in Fenn's

eye stopped him, and he became confused, incoherent. Nothing more to be got out of him, except, as he turned back to his work, a mumbled "Goo'bye, lass!" to Felicia. She found herself puzzled. What could the old man mean by that unpremeditated remark and query? Disguised in his broad dialect, they might *not* have been intelligible to her, but as it happened they were perfectly.

"Reckon they'll be in the usual place."

"Didn't the boy give you the message that they . . . ?"

The only conclusion to be drawn from this was that Fenn had been concealing something from her all the time. Certainly a boy *had* given him a message on arrival. He had listened, she remembered, without comment. Now she discovered that the message concerned the whereabouts of Stella and the Colonel! Yet all this time he had said nothing! Just let her hang about waiting! Had, in fact, beguiled her attention to other things. Stopped at nothing—even the books . . . even the lice! Her eyes froze at the thought of the game he had been playing with her, and she stood still, looking at him in anger and hostility. Facing her, he returned her glance with his usual unflinching hardihood, in which she suddenly seemed to detect the brassy impudence of a street urchin . . . An *unwashed* street urchin with li . . . No, no . . . that was an unfair association of ideas with known facts. It was not necessary to be ungenerous in order to show him where he stood in her estimation. Having reached the front of the house, she spoke to him with icy dignity:

"If you will give me the bread I'll drive myself back. It seems useless to wait any longer."

"Vyner has probably taken Mrs. Cardross home by the other road," he had the calmness to suggest, adding, airily, "I ought to have thought of that before."

"This is the first I have heard of another road."

"Well . . . perhaps you can hardly call it a road— a sort of track across the veld."

She didn't believe a word of it. For some reason he was trying to make a fool of her, but he shouldn't!

"Yes . . . it's a pity you didn't think of that before," she said with scornful deliberation. "Kindly have the bread put on."

She got into the car and Jackson started the usual crank-up business, and by the mercy of God, that "foul Under-seas," as she inwardly designated it, behaved itself for once. A good thing, too, for she was so angry that she'd have been ready to smash it up, if it hadn't.

"Do you think you can manage it through the Drift?" the offender suavely inquired, while stuffing loaves of bread into the back seat.

"If I can't I'll leave it in the river-bed, and walk home," she rapped back curtly, and swung the thing round with abruptness so that he had to jump like a jack-rabbit to get out of the way in time. That was some sort of consolation, of course, but no real revenge for the way she had been fooled for close on three hours. She very much doubted if there was any truth or sincerity in the man at all. He was an odious brute in fact.

Certainly, up to the moment of leaving the mill-house, the afternoon had seemed entertaining enough. But in the light of said entertainment being a mere means of keeping her unquestioning as to Stella and Vyner, it lost any glamour it might have contained. The implication that she was either curious, or sensitive as to their whereabouts, stung her to the quick. Let them spend as much time together and "in the usual place" as they liked. It interested her not at all, except as part of the errand that had brought her to the mine. Why should that brute think that it did? She flung up her head . . . then went suddenly hot and cold, remembering how she had "opened up" to him over books, and practically flung her friendship at his head! What a fool she had been! She could have bitten her tongue out. Anyway it had taught

her a lesson! She'd never speak to the man again if she could help it.

On arriving at the farm she sounded the horn with brisk impatience for someone to open the garage door, but instead of a boy, Dick came forth, swaying with nonchalant grace. Certainly it was the legitimate hour for "sundowners," but even so he had evidently been getting ahead with them more than was strictly necessary. He admitted the fact without being impeached.

"This is my fourth," he bragged, after staggering in under a load of bread as well as whisky. "But if you people *will* go off and leave a fellow alone from lunch till sunset what can you expect? Where's Stella?"

Felicia, spite of all, had entertained a faint hope of finding the others home before her, and was unprepared for the question, but fortunately the hoot of an approaching car saved further complications.

"Ah! Here she comes . . . and Vyner!" cried Dick. With the gravity of a man not quite sure of his movements he rose to busy himself about tonic. "I'd better make some more . . . she likes it fresh and very cold."

For a moment, uneasily, Felicia watched him filling the syphon from a Pasteur filter that lodged in a draughty corner of the stoep. She had recently seen a man nearly cut off a much steadier hand through a miscalculation with one of those sparklet bulbs. Having no desire to witness a repetition of that accident, she suggested that she should fix it, while he went out to meet the others. To her relief he acquiesced, and just as she had got the tonic singing shrilly in its glass-and-wire cage, they all came in. Stella was protesting to Dick, her idle, silvery tones slightly more *degagés* than usual:

"You've not been nearly so bored as I have, my dear! Those awful Que-Que people simply stuck and stuck, until nearly five. In common humanity I had to stay at the Mine and help Padge out with them."

To say that Felicia was struck dumb at this statement, so far removed from the real facts, is to say nothing. She could only set the syphon down and stare. Stella entering, sank with an air of ineffable fatigue into the most comfortable chair. Paget Vyner's face, behind her, wore a worried scowl, as well might anyone's who did not love lies.

"It must have been a riot," commented Dick, bustling to the business of regaling the weary ones. "Shonnie came tumbling back pale and worn a few minutes ago. Why didn't you two bring her, instead of letting her wrestle alone with that darned car?"

That must have been something in the nature of a thunderbolt, and in the short, sharp silence that fell, Felicia did not look at either of them, but reaching for the cigarettes, though she had already smoked her *quantum suff* for the day, carefully selected and lit another. As for Dick, heavy with libations, he really did not want an answer. He merely required that no one should give too much attention to that shaky hand of his while he served the drinks—Stella's as she liked it, long, weak, and stone-cold; Vyner's a more potent affair of deep amber colour.

It was certainly an awkward moment for everyone, except Dick, who suspected nothing. But fate in the shape of Countess Karamine was kind. She made a welcome interruption, hobbling in on her stick, dressed all ready for dinner, in purple georgette and pearls. Vyner, leaping up like a glad hare released from a trap, busied himself settling her carefully, with her lame foot and leg resting on a lower chair. Stella began babbling like a brook. Dick, still clear-headed enough to remember the "spotting" propensities of his cousin Letty's eagle-eye, mumbled something about not realizing how late it was, and toddled off, briskly if uncertainly, in the direction of the bath room. The Countess, who had mentally spent her day in Russia, was delighted that she could now go on talking on the subject with one who knew it, her only fear being that Vyner would be torn from her.

In the midst of a diatribe on Stolypin she stopped to enquire anxiously whether Vyner was staying to dinner. Stella, who seemed lost in her own thoughts, did not at once respond to the significant enquiry, so the lady clinched the matter in her usual dictatorial fashion by inviting him herself.

"But of course you must stop! Shonnie, get hold of Pagg and tell her that as we have a guest to-night, she is to help with the dinner arrangements. Let her make a special omelette *aux fines herbes.*"

"I'll stop with pleasure if this get-up can be overlooked?" Paget Vyner glanced from his grey lounge suit to each of the ladies in turn.

"Of course," said Stella absently, her mind obviously elsewhere. As for Felicia, she hurried away to instruct Pagg, and afterwards to her own hut, feeling thoroughly cross, disillusioned and tired, and wishing heartily that instead of dressing for dinner she could escape them all by going to bed . . . or out into the lovely peace of the night. For by now a flawless moon of pearl hung overhead, tender and luminous, filling the earth with "a snow-white mazy motion." The kind of moon one wanted to be out under with the one true and perfect friend! But *that* thought only brought a stab to her heart and a bright splash of colour to each cheek. Back came weariness, bewilderment and anger.

She meditated moodily while changing her gown. True, it was really no business of hers that Stella should lie about her movements during the afternoon . . . and Paget Vyner abet the lie. For he *had* abetted it, though saying nothing. His silence had given consent, and somehow she felt sickeningly disappointed in him, and hurt. She hated too, being in a conspiracy to deceive Dick. Why should poor old Dick be deceived? He only wanted to be decent to everybody, and have everybody decent to him! The whole thing seemed sordid, paltry and horribly depressing. Moreover, the headache she had pretended to earlier in the afternoon had de-

scended on her in earnest. Served her jolly well right too, she reflected. After all, in that, she had been no better than Stella, as far as lying was concerned, though for a different reason, and she justly deserved to have a pain like a hat-pin stabbed through her brain. As she stood dabbing her forehead with eau-de-Cologne, a tap came on the door and Stella stepped in. She had not changed her dress and her make-up, having worn rather thin during the afternoon, disclosed a white and worried set of features.

"Oh . . . Shonnie," she began in a somewhat constrained manner, "I wanted to thank you for 'standing by' so gamely just now. Of course I knew I could trust you not to give me away, but it was sweet of you all the same."

"Standing by!" "Give her away!" Felicia stared at her coldly.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Oh, yes, you do. Don't be stand-offish. You know quite well what a scene you could have precipitated by letting Dick tumble to it that I wasn't at the mine all the afternoon."

Felicia, turning back to the dressing-table, took up a comb and began to attack her hair, which owing to her various exertions, had come entirely unstuck and was waving and fronding all over the place in a manner that had to be restrained at once. Stella stood waiting with such patience as she could command—no very large stock to judge by the viperous glance she shot at the other's back. In fact it would have been plain to any observer that she was not enjoying her task of placation, and only performed it from some mysterious necessity of which she alone knew the secret. As Felicia still remained silent, she was obliged to take up her tale unsolicited:

"I really *had* been most sickeningly bored by those beastly Que-Que people, and even if they *didn't* stay till five I was just as exhausted as if they had, and simply longed for the peace and refreshment of a drive, so when Padge, who is so

understanding and restful, suggested it, I went. But of course we drove further than we meant to . . . as a matter of fact," she paused for an undecided moment, then plunged daringly on, "we went and had a look at the new house at Poinsettia Pass . . ."

It was unfortunate that in this connection Felicia remembered old Goodreef's words: "The usual place, I expect!" It made her voice rather hard when she spoke.

"Having spent the afternoon as you chose, Stella, I merely can't help wondering why you should bother to lie about it."

"Can't you? Well, you could perhaps if you knew Dick better. A man half-drunk is an uncertain quantity, and . . ."

"Oh, please . . ." the girl made a gesture of distaste.

"But you *must* listen," Stella's voice lost its silvery note and grew harsh. "I won't have you laying all the blame on me. Dick can be awful when his jealousy is roused, especially when he's been drinking, and *that* is the reason why I lied, instead of acknowledging that I had been driving with Padge."

It sounded a pretty thin—and in view of Dick's invariable good temper and unsuspecting nature—a singularly lame story. Felicia's eyes must have made the point her lips refrained from, for Stella grew shrilly angry.

"I can see you disbelieve me, but you don't know Dick, I tell you, and you don't know what rows there have been in the past—all about nothing too, men I haven't cared a tuppenny damn for—but I *do* care about Padge and Pat Fenn, and if anything interfered with my friendship for those two . . ." she sat down suddenly on the bed, biting her lips. There was complete silence for a moment. When she continued it was in a curiously shaken voice, with a glisten of tears in her eyes:

"The friendship of those two—and Tagati, to get away to sometimes, is absolutely all I've got in life."

"*Please* Stella—I don't want to hear any more. . . ." It seemed to Felicia not only disloyal in a wife to say such

things, but disloyal in a friend of Dick's to listen. But Stella would not be silenced.

"I don't care. You *shall* hear. My life is rottenly empty, I tell you, except for those two. It's true, and I *will* say it."

"Even if true . . ." began Felicia, and then broke off. She was profoundly shocked, but if Stella did not feel for herself the unwritten law that these things must be kept locked in the heart, it was no use trying to impart such instincts to her! Nothing to do but to remain silent until this trailing of human dignity in the dust was finished with, and the trailer had betaken herself off. But Stella having finished, showed no signs of quitting, so Felicia proceeded with the manipulation of her hair, her mind meanwhile manipulating the cardinal facts and persons of the ugly discussion. Dick . . . Fenn and Vyner! What was the real position of each, and why should it matter to her? Stella going off with Vyner, deceiving Dick about it, then explaining everything away with this "double friendship" story? . . . dragging in Fenn and coupling him up with Vyner, as though they were a pair of horses she had an exclusive right to drive! Fantastic that! But just as fantastic, that *she* should mind! She could only assign her intense irritation to Stella's revolting "cheek" and egoism. Why should that lady, after all, expect to have the run not only of her own husband, but of the two most interesting men in the place! For there was no denying that. Fenn and Vyner were attractive, and attracted her. And why should she be shut out from their friendship just because Stella had a *penchant* for proprietary rights? It was ridiculous. After all, a married woman couldn't expect to peg out claims like that to the exclusion of everyone else. It wasn't fair: it was not cricket: it must be combated! Of course if they *wanted* to be exclusively pegged out by Stella . . . but did they? Having reached this stage she looked at herself in the glass, and a tiny smile glinted for an instant across her lips. She had

thought of something to say that might possibly move Stella off to bed.

"Friendships with unmarried men are all right if one doesn't, in view of their ephemeral quality, let them assume too much importance in one's life."

Stella stirred.

"You mean those two will marry some day?"

Felicia's shoulders made a slight, regretful movement.

"*Then* where will I be? . . . is that what you mean?"

"If you care to put it that way," said Felicia quietly. "Generally speaking, there is nearly always the inevitable break."

"In this case there won't be." Stella was sitting up taut now. The glisten in her eyes no longer signified tears but the light of battle. "How wise you are, my dear Shonnie," she mocked softly, "but in this case your wisdom doesn't happen to apply. Neither Padge Vyner nor Patrick Fenn will ever think of marrying—while I need them."

Felicia, staring at herself in the glass, saw a strange light spring into her own eyes. Her face too, had grown curiously pale and brooding, but her voice remained composed.

"That is a bold thing to say about the will of other human beings!"

"One *is* bold when one is perfectly sure of one's ground," said Stella firmly, even, happily. She was entirely mistress of herself once more, with her subtle little smile back on her lips. Rising she moved idly towards the door, and with her hand on it, paused for an instant.

"Of course I'm not saying that I might not, some day, give one of them permission . . . even further the affair, if it pleases me to do so." Her accents were dovelike. "I must hurry now or I shall be late for dinner!"

. . . . . .

At that function several things were patent to the naked

eye or to an ear that exercised its hearing. Notably that Dick's fair hair had received a glorious share in the bath's refreshment and was still sleekly wet, to the distinct improvement of his speech and manner. Also that Stella's absent-mindedness had now transferred itself to Paget Vyner. He was quite frankly *distrait,* almost unhappy-looking. She, curiously enough, had captured a mood of unusual gaiety. Bright colour burned in her cheeks, and perpetual little trills of laughter broke from her lips. She teased and rallied everyone, especially Dick on his terrific farming efforts that wore him to the bone, gave him no time for social life, and burdened him with a premature gravity.

"What you need my dear, is a brisk walk every night after dinner," she announced, "and I am going to start you off on that good rule this very evening."

"What! No bridge to-night?" It was pathetic to see his incredulous pleasure at the prospect of having his wife's company to himself for once. Bridge was a mania with her, and whenever she could raise a four without him, his name was Walker, but if she couldn't she inspanned him. Loathing cards he hardly knew which alternative he detested most.

"Rather not!" said Stella sweetly, "On such a night? Haven't you noticed the moon, darling?"

"*I* have," said Vyner into Felicia's ear, "—and thought what a perfect night it would be for a stroll with the one perfect companion."

" 'Never the time and the place,' " she looked at him, coolly satirical, but he returned the glance challengingly.

"I intend, one of these days or nights to prove Browning wrong in that."

"You must tell me about it afterwards" she replied with indifference.

"There'll be no need," he returned, still under cover. But the Countess, on his off-side claimed him again. She had been talking throughout the meal of the ice-fields of Soklavata, Azeff, the arch-spy of long-ago days, and the "Okh-

ranka" the sinister society that had betrayed her husband into exile, and she now announced in true autocrat style:

"After dinner, Shonnie, you must play for us while I read Colonel Vyner my description of the night we set out for Siberia. We'll have a Russian evening."

It turned out, however, to be quite Rhodesian in character. Certainly, after Stella had gone off most determinedly with Dick for their walk, the scene was set, for a time, among spies, ice-fields, snowy steppes and wolves. The Countess, with a lamp behind her, read in a loud dramatic voice about these things, while Felicia made soft harmonies on the piano. But Paget Vyner had arranged his chair so that, without the Countess's eye on him, his could be on the girl at the piano. And they were disconcerting eyes, full of a stormy magnetism rather disturbing to a conscientious accompanist. She began reducing her efforts to the utmost minimum of sound, so that when at last she gently left off altogether the reader scarcely missed her. Vyner, spying her intention after a final soft crash of chords, sent her a look of concentrated agony, boredom, and pleading, but she merely made a face at him, and flitted.

Down by the river it was as peerless as she had known it would be. The big, shallow pools had rocks sticking up in them, and a fringe of reeds with the nests of weaver-birds swaying softly. The dark water mirrored the moon's serene loveliness amidst little scattering clouds. Soft cries of night things echoed across the empty spaces: the fantastic clutter of a cicada's wings; the queer, monotonous croak of the little mottled owl; the screeching whoop of the night-jar followed by a burble of feathers; the musical, almost bird-like chattering of singing frogs, with an occasional hoarse bellow from some veteran toad. Felicia sitting on a large flat black rock in the very heart of the river bed, secluded from the Drift, but open to the miracle of the skies, thought of Yeats' "Salley Gardens" and murmured its lines to herself:

"Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with her little snow-white feet.
She bid me take life easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears."

How anyone could accurately surmise that on all the Rhodesian veld she had chosen that particular spot to be in, was impossible to explain. Astonishing too, that a man once seized in the Countess's clinch should be able to make a clear breakaway. But in fairly quick time, Paget Vyner achieved both these miracles. It seemed that no sooner had Felicia deserted, than Buffalo Bill and Malcolm turned up, on the chance of getting a game of bridge, and were cordially invited by the Countess to become part of her audience.

"You should have seen their faces when they realized what they were in for," chuckled the graceless Vyner. "They glared at me like tigers when I fixed them in comfortable chairs right under her eye, while I took up a good position behind. As soon as she got well into her stride again, I folded my tent like the Arabs and silently stole away."

"Very mean of you!" said Felicia. "Cousin Letty not only has a high opinion of your literary criticism, but sets an inordinate value on your society."

"'Inordinate' is scarcely flattering!" He had sat down beside her on the large flat black rock. "It is not, for instance, the word I should use in describing my passion for *your* society."

"Very wise of you," she retorted dryly, "since I should not believe you in any case."

"Why?"

She threw a tiny piece of rock into the pool, and it made a delicious sprite-like splash.

"Does it matter why?" she asked carelessly.

"To me, yes, very much."

She said then, deliberately: "For reasons sundry and quite recent, it is possible I might hesitate to take your word on even so unimportant a matter."

"It is *not* an unimportant matter to me," he repeated, then paused. "I know what you mean," he said at last. "It has made me miserable all the evening, and will continue to haunt me long after you've forgotten it."

She remained silent and waiting. A lie, even the silent abetting of one, can't be spirited away by an expression of mere penitence, or a well-balanced sentence. Being one of those men to whom it was unnecessary to have to recount every thought that sped through the brain, or explain silences, he naturally understood.

"What can I say?" he asked helplessly. "If I point out that it was not *my* lie, I sound like a cad, yet the fact remains perfectly true." Felicia found another shingle of rock and threw it into the water. He should get no help from her. When presently he continued, his voice contained a certain measure of masculine impatience.

"If only Stella had been frank! There was no earthly reason why she shouldn't, except some obscure feminine one, incomprehensible to me." He turned and looked at Felicia. "Perhaps she has, or will, explain to you what mad impulse made her want to conceal so innocent a matter as a drive across the veld?"

But Felicia was not going to be drawn on the subject of what Stella had said, or might say. His way to grace must be by some other route than that.

"—But as she was *not* frank what could I do but keep silence?" he pleaded, "Won't you try and see the position in which I was placed?"

"Does it really matter what I think?" she repeated, but less obdurately, for she had to admit that he had put his case well. Also, he was terribly good-looking, sitting there.

"Shonnie! . . . won't you realize how much everything you think and do and say matters to me. . . ?"

It seemed time for her to get up from the flat, black rock, and she did so in one swift almost feline movement. There was danger in the moonlight and in his words, for one who had not decided that she wanted to hear such words, or her name on his lips. Danger too in the fact that, as she rose, he caught her hand, and held it against his lips: and in the warm, seductive, voice that had a curious power of reaching the brain via the backbone!

"Please don't say and do such things!" she said, assembling as much firmness and dignity as she could, with a hand still pressed against hot lips, and a trembling in her blood.

"How can I help it? You are the loveliest thing on God's earth . . . a man would be a stock or a stone not to covet you for his own . . . Shonnie!"

He was standing beside her now, and added to the lure of his voice, and her own trembling blood, a most distracting scent of tobacco from his coat mixed itself with the exotic fragrance of some night flower growing near. These trifles and forces together managed to make a little wild song that sang either in her heart or her wrists, she really couldn't be certain which! And while she was wondering which, it is just possible that in another second she might have been in his arms, accepting his kisses, but for a clear cold sound that fell between them like a stone.

"Coo-ee!" It came from the right bank where, outlined clear in the light above them, stood Dick and Stella.

"Coo-ee!" the latter called again, on a bell-like note, "Come on up, and we'll go home together."

CHAPTER IV

How much had they seen? Was the little tableau in the river as clear to them as their own figures had been to the two on the black rock? Felicia could not tell. She could only be thankful, from her crown to her heels that Stella's disconcerting *Coo-ee!* had startled her out of what might have proved an irrevocable decision, as irrevocable that is to say as such emotional crises ever are or need be. In these enlightened days a girl is not signed and sealed away to a man, just because she had been in his arms and burned under his lips. Felicia had not gone through her twenty-one years unkissed by any means. She loved men, and understood the lure they have, and that it has been arranged all down the centuries they *are* to have; the pagan things they put into their eyes and voices, to curl a woman up like a roseleaf one minute, and make her expand into full blossom the next. Nature, for her own purposes, means women to understand these things, and they are frankest and happiest when they do, provided that they have been brought up under moral and social laws that teach self-control and restraint.

All the same, she said to herself, there are some kisses, some emotions that one has an instinct to escape from, until one is absolutely certain! . . . In a way, it is like learning to swim before launching out into the deep, playing on the beach, and dabbling at the edges of the sea until certain of the capacity, the courage, above all, of the intense desire, to take grandly and serenely the great plunge, giving body and soul to the embrace of the ocean—of life, of love!

She knew herself to possess those qualities of nature

that are comprised under the heading of that tiresome word, temperament, which really compose a much more complicated affair than one word can express.

In the first place her father and mother had loved each other deeply, so it happened that she was a love-child in the only real sense of the expression, and you had only to look at her,—sound and sweet, curved, tinted, burnished, gracile and strong,—to realize that she had sprung from some noble plan of living. She could not but know she was beautiful, even if men and mirrors had never told her so; but secretly what she valued, infinitely more than beauty, were the gifts those two lovers had put into her heart and brain: imagination, understanding, love of love and love of life, warmth of nature, tingling pulses for romance, race in her veins and sprites in her mind. But secretly too she had often thanked God for the tenderness that hedged those early years after her mother's death. If, instead of her father's loving tolerance and wisdom, she had been obliged to contend with harsh authority, feminine tyranny, even the petty restraints sometimes imposed by the best of mothers, it would have been fatal to her particular temperament. Only she herself knew the call that wild paths and dangerous precipices had for her, and how easily and willingly she could have been driven to dancing over them. Always quite frankly she had recognised this, and been thankful for a spiritual training strong enough to hold her together in the dangerous moments that come to all attractive women, who are correspondingly assailed by the attraction of men. At such times nothing but training and tradition can save such from the dominion of the senses.

After the incident with Paget Vyner on the river rock, she had wisdom, or wit enough, to keep distance between herself and him until she could come to an understanding with her heart. It was a terrible temptation to plunge right into a love affair with him, leaving it for time to prove whether he was the right man for her, or not. She was intensely at-

tracted to him, for besides being so good to look at he had the charm of sophistication that means so much to a girl. The way he looked at a woman, put her into a car, tightened her stirrup, or held her while dancing, each was full of a long experience of women that made him horribly attractive. She didn't know why these things were so, but they were.

At the end of a week of parlous indecision, during which she took great pains to avoid anything like a *tête-à-tête* with Vyner, a dance was given in the Dorp.

It was a big dance at the Drill Hall. Everyone had been looking forward to it, getting ready their best frocks, and making their own little private plans. Felicia's card had long since been more than filled by men determined not to get left in the scrum; and in a country where there are twice as many men as women, it was impossible not to admire the enterprise of these "bold, bloody, and resolute ones," while trusting that diplomacy would be equal to the occasion when it came. Whatever objection she raised at seeing three names down for each dance was met by the cheery argument that it would be all right on the night. This optimistic attitude being founded on the chances of the other two fellows not turning up. There were, it seemed, a number of mishaps that might befall one or both—if not all three —of the candidates. A *bona fide* Rhodesian, in a position to know, supplied her with a list of the most salient contingencies. Aspirants might, he said, be variously overcome by sunstroke, fever, losses on their tobacco, the vagaries of their car, or the perfidy of *ponjola*. It might happen that they had been arrested for smacking a native, committing justifiable murder, exceeding the speed limit, fraudulent bankrupcty, possessing a cow with ten engorged ticks on it, shooting without a licence, or procuring a car without any visible means of paying for it. The wash-boy might not have returned their only dress shirt in time, (and the nearest neighbour be requiring his); white ants might have eaten their evening trousers,

or Selkiem's might not have their size in dancing pumps. In fact, in a country like Rhodesia, absolutely anything might happen to spoil a good man's pleasure.

On the evening in question, Felicia couldn't help feeling that if the arrangements for driving to the Dorp had been left to her, she could have achieved them more satisfactorily, but Stella, as usual, had the making of them. The only consolation was that they might have been worse. Naturally she had seized *both* the Tagati men as her escort, keeping the fourth seat in their car for the Countess, being well aware of the probability of that lady's non-fulfilment of a threat to complete the *partie-carrée*. As indeed happened. But Fate put a spoke in her wheel at the last moment, by producing a neighbour who wanted a lift . . . a little fluffy vulgar woman capable of making any *partie-carrée* sore-cornered as well as four-cornered. So that really, Felicia, in Buffalo Bill's car with Dick and Malcolm, was not so badly off as some people. In fact she did not really mind both the Tagati men being snatched away, for deep in her heart she nursed the knowledge that one at least of them would rather have been with her, and that both were down on her programme to be discarded or danced with as seemed most fitting. Not that she meant to discard Paget Vyner. But perhaps she contemplated something of the sort for Fenn. Having never danced with him, or seen him dance with anyone but Stella, she might have felt more kindly disposed toward him if Stella had not said at dinner:

"I have told Pat Fenn it is absurd of him to confine his ball-room attentions to an old married woman like me. He is to dance with you to-night, Shonnie."

On that a blight fell upon Felicia's friendly intentions. Thank you for nothing, Stella! She was looking of course, anything but "old and married." Her gown (what there was of it) a stunner from Lucille's, fell off her in waves of shimmering green transparencies. She looked like a tinted cameo rising from a sea-bath. The Countess remarked it

when they went to her hut to show off their gowns before leaving, adding dryly:

"A few yards of towelling might be useful my dear, unless you want to catch cold."

Stella only laughed over her shoulder, and all down her bare satiny back, as she went out.

"Stripped to the buff!" said old Letty harshly, "Only cabaret women did it in my days,—I am glad to see *you* have a sense of decency, Shonnie."

"Don't be unkind, cousin Letty," was the flippant answer. "A sense of decency sounds an awful thing to be carrying about with one." She looked at herself in the Countess's mirror, the only other full length one at Manana, beside the one in Stella's hut; and came to the conclusion that white was most satisfying for evening wear. Especially filmy white that floats about you like a frosted cobweb, and through which you glimmer like a pearl of great price!

"Nevertheless, my dear," asserted the Countess, "it *is* a saving grace, so be thankful to add it to your other graces. For your consolation I may observe that you look even more rare, delicate, and valuable than usual this evening."

Which was really handsome of the old Tartar, especially as she followed it up by offering the loan of her string of pearls, always called by Felicia the "tears of the moon" necklace, because it contained two hundred and fifty small pearls, as tragically beautiful as only emblems of sorrow can be. It fell far below her waist, and gave the finishing touch to a picture of flowery grace.

Stella had wasted no time about getting off with her band, but in the stoep Felicia's three cavaliers waited and took deep breaths at sight of her. They decided that the pleasure of sitting next to such fragrance and beauty, must be tossed for, and Buffalo Bill won, which was very fitting, since the car was his. The secret adorer of Gladys Cooper had quite got over his shyness, and was an entertaining companion once he got going. She loved his stories of the Boer war,

in which he had taken part as a trooper of the B.B.P. There was one strange tale of a Colonel "Lyditte," so called because the Boers loved him with the same intensity they felt for that high explosive, which represented their first experience of civilised warfare! The Colonel had charge of a prisoners' camp somewhere near a river in Cape Colony, and achieved his particular bid for immortality, by ordering his bearded and whiskered prisoners, not only to be shaved and shorn daily but to attend, even in the depths of winter, a bathing parade at dawn. The poor old Boers, immune to sneers of "Beaver!" and foreign to the blessings of water as a toilet necessity, never forgave him. Neither did Buffalo Bill.

"The autocratic ignorance and intolerance of a typical British martinet!" he commented, and Felicia joined issue with him at once. They had a spirited argument in which Dick and Malcolm took part, with much good-natured scoffing at Buffalo Bill's pro-Boer sentiments. In fact a very merry drive.

And a beautifully-timed arrival at the Drill Hall just as the first Tango was being blared forth, from what Dick vulgarly described as an over-sexed saxophone. Stella in the arms of Patrick Fenn, already skimmed the floor like a shining green bird, and Vyner was dancing with Hibiscus de Wilton, stormily handsome in a dress as flaming as her name. Felicia chose Dick from the three she had booked, and found that he danced extraordinarily well for a man of his bulk. Far better than Paget Vyner with whom she next found herself. But then it was not possible to think of dancing when in Paget Vyner's arms, with that secret, seductive voice murmuring secret, seductive words; all the forbidden things his eyes had been saying during the week of silence, dropping at last from his lips. It was rather like taking sips of crystal-cold and very heady champagne, though Felicia did her best to ward off intoxication, by flippant rejoinder and semi-serene rebuke.

"Why have you fled from me all the week? . . . Loveliest and best . . . knowing me starving. . . ."

"I deny both those exaggerated statements."

"I swear it . . . I've been famished for a word from you. . . . *One* word would have made me happy."

"Please try to be sensible, Colonel Vyner."

"I am only too sensible, alas! And if you call me Colonel again I shall stop the band."

"I don't know what good that will do."

"Merely enable me to make myself heard when I go into the middle of the room and announce that I love you."

"This is rank intimidation!"

"Yes I know . . . but I shall do it just the same."

"People would think you were drunk of course, are you?"

"Yes—drunk with the loveliness, the fragrance of you . . . and getting worse every moment."

"I shall have to re-cast my partners, and re-arrange my evening."

"You couldn't be so cruel. Besides I'd follow you everywhere, and make the other fellows' lives a hell. . . ."

"*My* feelings, of course, would not count?"

"Beautiful one! Your feelings are all that count. . . . Come out into the night. I want to talk to you."

"I would rather dance, please."

"We *must* talk . . . you know what it is I want to say."

"But I don't know whether I care enough to listen."

"You *do* care . . . I swear you do."

"You are more than a little bit vain, aren't you?" she bantered him rather breathlessly.

"No, only full of an old sweet wisdom . . ." (The way of a man with a maid, he thought.)

"Well . . . I, not being so wise, must have time to think."

"Time! . . . O my Shonnie, have you not already taken a week? One hundred and sixty-eight hours . . . Six hundred and four thousand eight hundred seconds? I know be-

cause I have counted them separately and they've seemed like years."

"How ridiculous you are!" She laughed but was the more resolved to hold out against him, and against herself until . . . Oh! she didn't know until *when,* or what. She felt all the racial glamour of him, that magnetic Irish ardour strong enough to sweep her off her feet, and set her awhirl with reckless longing to do as he asked and let the future take care of itself. Still . . . she seemed to be waiting for some signal from her own heart, some bell that had not yet struck. And when the dance was over she refused, smiling, but firm, to follow the many other couples into the cool dimness of a great stretch of land that was the Show ground. Rows of motor cars out there, not too close together, offered the solitude and obscurity so satisfying to lovers. But Felicia Lissell, not sure of being a lover, nor of wanting one, preferred the Hall verandah, where seats had been quite pleasantly but publicly arranged, amid flowering plants and palms. There, Vyner could talk to her without being overheard . . . if talking was what he wanted . . . and if he spoke low enough. It was a good deal safer than a motor car, or even a big, flat, black rock in the middle of a river bed! He did talk,—with a sad and haunting reproachfulness:

"You do not trust me, Shonnie . . . or yourself!"

She only smiled faintly and would not explain that it was perhaps less distrust of him, than of those subtly nebulous forces that out under the stars can coerce the senses . . . the limpid airs, soft scents, and strange intoxication of an African night.

". . . you've *got* to marry me, darling."

"I must have time to consider this thing," she repeated.

"But not too long," he pleaded. "How long? A week . . . a fortnight? A month?" After each period she shook her head, but he gave no heed. "You can't have more than

a month, and at the end of that we will marry at once. Promise me." Under cover of a palm-leaf fan he caught her hand and held it close. "We will elope. I have always wanted to elope with the girl I marry." He looked at her with mad gay eyes, "Primitive, I know, but don't you feel the thrill of it, Shonnie? A man carrying off his beloved . . . to his own fastness to have and to hold, from that day forth for evermore."

Oh, yes, she felt the thrill of it, and of all the things in his eyes and in his voice. Even in that prosaic verandah full of sitters-out she felt the thrill.

"We will be secret and swift," he whispered hotly, "and let no one 'in' on our plans. I'd get a special license, we'd arrange with the parson or the Beak to marry us, and take train straight off to the wilds . . . somewhere up beyond the Falls. Would you do that, Shonnie?"

She only smiled, but *that* had its appeal for her, too. What girl does not like to be swept off her feet? Besides, always she had believed that lovers should do this, marry, swiftly, secretly, simply, their job for themselves, the crowd evaded; the whole world empty for them, of people, yet fuller than the sea of wonders.

He began to describe an Island he knew on the broad bosom of the Zambesi, calling up the loveliness of tree and flower and bird, the soft scented grasses to rest on, a smell of wood-smoke from the camp, a launch waiting at the sedgy, rush-fringed, landing; to take them down the great mysterious river.

"Does that find no echo in your heart? Would you go there with me, Shonnie. . . ?"

"I would . . . if I cared. If I were certain of your being the one man. . . ."

"Darling, I am. How dare you doubt it?"

The music had begun again, a dreamy swaying thing now, that called to the blood of youth. It was not a good band, but the blare and blatancy, had toned itself down for that

lovely air of Strauss's. Felicia's soles tingled, and her heart suddenly began to tremble as if something was soon to happen. Men began to hurry from the marquee labelled "Bar," back to the verandah, seeking their partners. Couples came bustling in from the darkness. Felicia looked at Vyner questioningly. Would he ask her to cut her rightful partner so that he might once more take her into his arms to the rhythm of that haunting melody? Or was he deaf to its inviting message and its portent? There was indeed urgency in his answering glance, and his words were feverish.

"Cut this and come with me," he implored. "Let's slip out, just for a little while . . . please, *please, darling.*"

But that way madness lay, and she shook her head. A glance at her card showed Patrick Fenn's name down, and almost instantly she saw him approaching. She had certainly meant to cut him for this dance, but since he had the grace to seek her diligently, she decided to make necessity a virtue and use him as a chance to escape.

"I won't let you go!" Vyner muttered angrily, and as she rose threw out his hand in a possessively detaining gesture. But under the surprise and delicate pride of her eyes his hand fell to his side, and she laid hers in Fenn's arm. She had scarcely spoken to him since the afternoon at Tagati, and did not intend to now, but clearly he had his uses as a rescuer from the importunate Irishman. Turning to the latter, to throw him, as she could afford to do now that she had won, a conciliatory word, she was just in time to intercept a glance of extraordinary hostility between the two. Vyner, gone suddenly pale, had a look of hate in his eyes. Fenn's were smiling, but hard with the grim amusement of a boxer who has the best of the fight. In that instant she knew what she had always dimly divined:—These men were enemies!

A moment later she was in the ballroom, Fenn's arm round her, dancing. But with what a difference! No sips of crystal champagne. No burning words dropped into her ear.

No honey and incense. Nothing but the hold of an arm, careless but firm as steel about her. Yet, after a few seconds she began to feel, as ever, the power of this man; that though he spoke nothing, it was not for lack of things to say . . . if he chose to say them! Some day he would say to someone the kind of things Paget Vyner had been saying to her. Yet they would not really be like any other man's words. Dreamily, almost drowsily, she found herself wondering how he would make love, his manner of speech, fashion of touch, all the while moving dreamlike, in the most adorable rhythm she had ever known. No wonder Stella always monopolised him. It was as if they too were melted into pure harmony of movement. He could dance! Never had she experienced anything like it. He steered like the mariner he was, and that firm, yet delicate holding of her, gave her the strange illusion that she was not a woman, but an armful of blossom that must not have a petal shaken off.

No use pretending that this man represented a negligible quantity! He did nothing of the kind. He had extraordinary personality. Everything he did, even to being silent, stamped him apart, different from other men. Not only that, but as they moved unspeaking, in an ecstasy of rhythm, vitality seemed to come out of him, and reach to the very core of her. She felt her fingers tingling in his, almost as though his blood flowed into and mingled with hers, passing through her body, and reaching her heart at last, holding it still and trembling. It was so strange, so invading a sensation that suddenly she resented it furiously. Her spirit reared at being made to feel at one like this with a man who after all habitually avoided her, and whom another woman claimed as her property, and who, at all times, seemed to openly prefer the society of that woman. Not that she blamed him for preferring Stella; but need he be so obvious about it? Perhaps these thoughts of hers communicated themselves to him in some subtle way. At any rate the perfect harmony of their mood and movement was

interfered with; he knew there was something wrong and, perhaps wilfully, misinterpreted it.

"Must one say pretty things?" he asked in the caustic tone he usually kept for her. She was furious at the implication of shallow vanity.

"What makes you so malevolent towards me?" she asked, putting as much contemptuous indifference as she could into the enquiry.

"Malevolent?" he echoed, with a surprise that, if assumed, was very well done. After a moment he queried in turn: "Why when there are right words for everything do you choose to use wrong ones?"

"Perhaps I have not been so carefully educated as you," she retorted. Mean of her, she knew, but her blood was up. Instantly afterwards she regretted her malice.

"I got some sort of education in a charity school as you probably know," he said quietly. She flushed for shame, and strove to make honourable amend, stammering:

"What does that matter? You are better educated than most men I've met out here, and better read . . . but . . ."

"*But* . . . there are some things one can't learn out of books . . . isn't that what you were going to say?"

"No it isn't," she said tempestuously, "and I wish you wouldn't always be putting words into my mouth and thoughts into my head. You are so obsessed by that silly *idée fixe* of yours, of not being up to the social mark that you make yourself and everyone you speak to, perfectly miserable."

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly, "I will try never to offend in that direction again."

After that, silence. They continued moving automatically like a pair of Dutch dolls, she with a smear of furious red in each cheek, he pale under his clear tan but with a blaze in his eyes. She could have wept but instead her face hardened into a mask. A delicious dance spoiled, she was thinking—spoiled and ruined by his insensate dislike of her,

amounting to scorn and ridicule. He had done just the same with her pleasant afternoon at Tagati. Destroyed it, as he had destroyed this dance. Yes, she could have wept. Not only with anger at him but at herself for having been betrayed into that ignoble, ungenerous gibe at his education. What could she have been thinking of! She who hated hurting anyone, even those who disliked her and whom she scorned. Her heart burned with misery in her breast.

The dance over he took her back to the verandah and found her a comfortable chair, and to the suggestion of a cold drink for her, she assented quickly. He went away while she looked about her feverishly for some face she knew. But there was none. Vyner had disappeared. Not a soul of the Manana party anywhere! Fenn returned with the cold drink and they sat in silence while she sipped it. Both were too furious to talk platitudes, and too miserable or too proud to make the necessary gesture of friendliness. She longed for the music to start again and rid her of his company, and thanked goodness when it did. Very different music this time however: a bright jerky two-step to which everyone immediately began to hum and chant gay stupid words.

"Horsey! keep your tail up
keep your tail up
keep your tail up
Horsey! keep your tail up
Keep the sun out of my eyes!"

Fenn rose, with what seemed to her offensive alacrity.

"Will you excuse me? I have to get off and dance this."

"Of course." What she longed to say was— "Get off and dance it, and get out of my life as well!"

"Shall I find your partner first?"

"I expect my partners to find me!" She rebuffed him curtly, and on that he left her, repassing almost immediately with a woman in pale green at his side . . . Stella, who

catching sight of her called out laughingly: "Forsaken? . . . or only forlorn?"

Her face scorched. She made no answer except, for a serene glance, but when they had passed she looked down at her card, mentally preparing scorpions for the whipping of the man whose name should be there. But the name was Dick's, and a minute later he came up looking miserable and apologetic. He was hating the whole show he said. His collar irked him, his pumps were too tight, he was getting altogether too old for that sort of thing, and would far rather be in bed with a good book.

"Haven't you been dancing?"

"No, I only care for it with Stella, or you . . . and you are both booked up to the hilt, naturally. Nothing for a back number like me to do but breast the bar."

She already knew this Rhodesian euphemism for "lolling where the drinks are longest"—and recognised that as usual his had been strong as well as long.

"Dick! Let's go home," she said suddenly. "You are bored, and I'd give anything not to dance any more to-night." His eyes brightened, but he shook his head.

"You are only being good-natured."

"I swear I'm not. I don't know if it's the heat, or the floor or what, but I'm absolutely done in. Couldn't we steal away, without upsetting the rest of the party?"

"Rather. The Tagati fellows will bring Stella back. She means to stay for hours. Told me so just now, and advised me to go on home. I've got the Underseas outside —lent it to Barry you know, but on the understanding I should have it, to drive back in. He can easily get a lift with Glyn."

"Do let's go then, before anyone stops us," she said fervently, seized with a longing to avoid further dancing. Not only was she strangely exhausted, but her mind and spirit were a jumble of confusion, surprise and indecision. One thing was certain, she did not wish to dance or talk again that

night with Paget Vyner, and there would be no avoiding it if she stayed. She flew to get her wraps, and Dick on his part being equally diligent, the Underseas was actually under way before the last bars of "Horsey keep your tail up" had been reached. Felicia felt as if she had escaped some grave pitfall of the soul.

. . . . . .

It was a long while before she got to sleep that night. Outside, the world was dark, except for the ghostliness of the stars, and strangely still. Every tree, bird, and insect seemed to be waiting, in breathless silence for the rain which had been threatening for days, but would not come. Only from the native compound, some half-mile away, came a muffled monotonous thrumming. There was a boy on the farm called Sehla, (pronounced Sishlee—and meaning "walk backwards") a little powerful fellow in his teens, with a real prognathous skull, and seeming on the surface of things to be utterly savage, without a gleam of higher intelligence. Yet he had the love of music in his soul, and the gift of making something like melody, even out of the bottom of a petrol tin. No matter what he carried while walking about, empty watering-can, tin plate, wash-up dish, he would turn it upside down, hold it like a violin and draw extraordinary and intriguing sounds from it. So Felicia easily guessed it to be Sehla who thrilled the night with his sombre significant thrumming. Perhaps some ancestor of his had been a witch doctor, whose business it was to put dreadful apprehension into the blood of listening victims before the final horror of "smelling out!" There seemed to be some sombre foreboding in that steady muffled drumming, yet it was narcotising, and Felicia fell at last into uneasy sleep from which she awoke abruptly and surprised. The night was still black and heavy with silence, but she had the startled conviction that just before awakening, the sound of her name had fallen clearly upon her sleep-dulled ears. Some brief and pregnant

phrase with the word "Shonnie" in it had been spoken! She was as certain of that, as that she lived. Knowing her door to be locked, and that the window, though open, had bars across it she felt no apprehension, only a great curiosity. The sound had come from somewhere outside, and her first clear thought, as she lay intently listening was that Stella's hut, being nearest, it must be from there that the sound had proceeded. Immediately this conviction was confirmed, for the words that now reached her in a passionate stormy cry, were unmistakably spoken by Stella:

"I'll never give you up to any woman! I'd rather kill her first . . . or you!"

"Don't be a fool, Stella . . . You can't give what you haven't got." It was a firm voice, low and guarded, but not too low and guarded for Felicia to recognise! Not only that, but the intonation of it unexpectedly woke a memory. Words, a sentence, spoken in that same way, kind almost tender, yet with a touch of brutality in the utterance,—flashed back into the listening girl's mind:

"Damn you, Stella! Won't you ever learn to play the game?"

Yes! She knew now who it was that had spoken in the darkened room of the Dorp Hotel. Fenn! Fenn . . . used to Stella in his room; yet furious about it: speaking more in irritation than surprise at what he believed to be her unexpected invasion!

But *now* there was no question of mistake or unexpectedness. He had brought Stella back from the dance and was there with her at the door of her hut. But for recognition of his voice, it might have been just possible to suppose that it was Dick Cardross whom his wife so stormily addressed, and in whose arms she now stifled her sobs—tho' Dick, heavyfoot and sleepy, slouching, lantern in hand towards his own hut at the further side of the garden, was the last object on which Felicia's eyes had rested as she closed her door. So now at last she knew the truth. The long mystery was solved!

A great misery welled up in her, and her heart seemed to twist under the agony of that piercing pain, that once before, but not so poignantly, had found its most vital spot. She turned her face to the wall, even as her spirit turned away from this secret baseness that had been forced upon its notice. But her ears at least were obliged to hear more . . . the soft closing of a door, the careful pad of departing feet. He had gone now, and Stella withdrawn into her hut was alone with her fierce thoughts of that other woman whom she would rather kill than give up to. And who was the other woman? Though the night was warm Felicia shivered involuntarily in her bed.

. . . . . .

In Africa, the land where "everything that doesn't bite, scratches," dawn is about the only time that has even the appearance of innocence. The nights, spite of magical beauty, are full of sinister happenings in the animal world, to judge by the cries of ferocity, terror, and pain that ring out of the darkness, and even the birds are not silent as in other countries: there are certain winged things that cry like lost souls: the hoot of the owl is a heart-stirring sound: the night-jar pursues his courtship with formidable clangour; kivikees, for no known reason, rise suddenly from their rest and fly in shrieking bands across the midnight skies.

But in the dawn all seems lovely and serene. Perchance it is only seeming. Mayhap there is the usual amount of bloody murder and sudden death, going on full-tilt in the animal and insect kingdom, even in the human one. But who is to believe it, with dawn decorating the skies, like a pure and lovely bride, decked in purple and amber, with sandals of gold upon her rose-pink feet?

Felicia Lissell, always glad of the peace of dawn, was never more so than on the morning after the dance in the Dorp. But it did not stay peaceful very long. It never did at Manana. Dick seeing her out, feeding the doves and

starlings that had learned to look for her with bird-seed in her hand, strolled over from his bath to tell her that the bread question was again acute. Nobody had thought of bread while in the Dorp, and there was no more than half a loaf in the house. Which, as he said, wouldn't have mattered if there had been any flour, but inspection of the bin had revealed a mere scraping. She listened to his story coldly. Her month's house-running was up, and she didn't propose to extend it.

"There's bags of eggs, and nearly a whole ham, but brekker without the staff of life's a bit of a washout, ain't it?" complained Dick.

"I should say so."

"Another thing: that rotten brute Kowunder, who, as you know, has been dying of a sore thumb all the week, must have made up his mind to give up the ghost at his own kraal, for he up and off during the night. We're in the lurch for a cook."

"There's Jim, isn't there?"

"Jim, my dear child, is all right as a nigger, but as a cook he doesn't exist. Have you ever tasted any of his concoctions?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well don't. His boiled eggs resemble rocks, his fried ones, taste like saffron-coloured lumps of leather rolled in the dirt, bacon is a mystery to him, toast a joke. Besides, there's nothing to toast!" said Dick, concluding this philippic.

"What about it?" She looked at him crossly. "Why do you foist your domestic problems on me, when I am enjoying the dawn?"

"Well, you're the only one who ever has any ideas about anything. Besides," (grinning) "you've got to eat, too, haven't you?"

"Any of the others up yet?"

"Naturally Stella hasn't emerged. It's as much as my

life's worth to disturb her, either. Cousin Letty will, I hope, continue to be incapacitated, but Pagg with a bit of luck might be inspanned, mightn't she, think you?"

"There's a lot to do for cousin Letty in the morning, and it's scarcely playing the game, to filch Pagg away before eleven."

"Then it's up to you, beautiful one. I've just heard that one of my calves has broken a leg, and I must go and set it. After that I'll give you a hand, but the boys will do anything for *you,* of course."

"That's all very well!" she grumbled, as he scuttled off. Nevertheless she proceeded to the larder in the hope of discovering some overlooked provender to fill the bill. Which actually proved the case. A six-pound tin of fine oatmeal, left over from the winter before, when Dick had indulged in a spell of porridge, came unexpectedly to hand. Mixed with scrapings from the flour-bin it seemed possible to turn this into some kind of scones, or Scotch cakes. She explained the idea to Jim, and was met with grins of intelligence and delight. But that was about as far as his assistance extended.

While she was juggling with her ingredients a strange boy approached the kitchen door, carrying a letter stuck in a forked stick.

"*'Nubani lo?'*" enquired she, proud of knowing the correct lingo for "What's that you've got there?"

"A letter for Missis, from Tagati Mine," he replied in excellent English, tendering the missive. But it was not for her. Typed boldly across it were the words:

(Private) Mrs. Cardross,
Manana Farm.

Calling Jim, who had gone to lay the breakfast table, she instructed him to take it to his mistress's hut; while with a scorching spot in each cheek, and another burning a hole in her heart, she concentrated attention strictly on cooking

operations. To such effect that the cookies were a marvellous success. Dick returning from his bone-setting job with "a twist" on him, ate six straight off the pop, while the Countess despatched Pagg to say, that for once she had forsaken charcoal biscuits, and gorged herself on hot cakes. Stella also sent a message that she'd join them presently, but they were not to wait breakfast for her. Dick stated that he had fixed up the bread difficulty: Lincoln had been over to ask for the loan of the Underseas and would bring back a sack of flour and some bread with him from the Dorp. Lincoln was a poor down-at-heel fellow, farming close by, whom Dick seemed to think it was his duty to stand by in affliction. But then Dick was everybody's man. According to Stella this silly sense of duty towards other people amounted almost to a vice. If anyone hadn't a car they must have *his* for their need. The same with his plough, his ox, and his ass.

"I wonder you don't offer them your wife," she exclaimed in excessive irritation when the day before the tennis court needed rolling, and the roller was missing. Dick made no reply, but gave her a look of indignation that must have penetrated even *her* armour-plating.

Just as they were finishing breakfast, she came in gaily and Dick congratulated her on being fresh as a flower after dancing all night. Felicia thought that if flowers were in question it must be a dahlia, for Stella's erect, golden, rather hard beauty always reminded her of them. Only a woman would notice, that there were bruised-looking shadows under the gay amber eyes. Even if Felicia had not remembered that angry sobbing during the night, she would have known the other had been weeping, but Dick, absorbed in recounting the accident to one of his best calves, and how beautifully he had set the leg, noted nothing of the languor beneath his wife's sprightliness. When he had finished and awaited her commendation, she said as if she had heard nothing of the tale.

"I want the car to run into town this morning." Dick's stare of surprise gradually took on a lugubrious tinge as he remembered Lincoln.

"I'm awfully sorry, old girl. If I had known . . ."

Stella looked up sharply. "Don't call me 'old girl,' please! What's the matter with the car?"

"Nothing . . . only first thing this morning I promised Lincoln . . ." Stella did not wait for the end of the story.

"He can't have it then," she broke in. "Why should we lend our car to that loafer?"

"But he hasn't got one," said Dick, going to his high crescendo, and staring blue-eyed.

"As if that has anything to do with us." Her tone was contemptuous. "Besides, I particularly want it."

"I suppose you couldn't give him a lift," began Dick, then, at her face, abandoned the idea. "Oh, well! I'll have to make up some tale," he muttered gloomily. "Anyway you'll be able to call at the bank and see Mason for me. I had a snotty letter from him yesterday about my overdraft. We want bread and flour, too, Selkiem's."

Stella interrupted again, "Mason's wife and I are not on speaking terms, and I hate going into that beastly Selkiem's. You must send a boy in on your bicycle."

As she did not want to listen to any more of this domestic argument, Felicia arose, and went out through the back stoep to pay her matutinal visit to the Countess. That lady had endured a night full of sciatica, and neuralgic pains.

"I am convinced it is the farm water," she declared. "Nasty hard stuff! I can't think what Mengies would say if he knew I was drinking it!"

Mengies was her Harley Street specialist, who, listening to her, one might suppose spent his whole life in agitated concern as to her state of health, and what she was doing to endanger it. Felicia, who knew this childish delusion well, smiled.

"And here have I been thinking how soft and milky Rhodesian water is, after the stuff out of London taps!"

"Nonsense," growled Countess Karamine. "Stuff and nonsense. Damme, I tell you it's like drinking steel filings. My inside feels like a stone quarry. Mengies will be furious: you must get me some Contrexeville water at once."

"Where from?"

"Don't ask me where from," was the irritable reply. "How do I know? I can only tell you I shan't stay in this dreadful country another day, if I can't have Contrexeville."

"Well, I believe the car's going to town. I'll see what can be done." Felicia walked away, wondering that a woman who had boiled snow with mud, to drink on the Siberian steppes, should kick at such water as came out of the granite-formation farm-wells. It was like wrapping yourself in liquid silk to get into a bath at Manana! Back at the house, she found that Stella and Dick, the rumpus apparently over, had migrated to the front stoep. But Dick still looked slightly harassed. Perhaps because his imagination had not yet produced a sufficiently palliative excuse for the unlucky Lincoln. Oh perhaps he was worrying over who was going to bring back the flour, for a boy on a bicycle certainly could not manage more than a few pounds! It occurred to Felicia that in that matter at least she might be of use, and she offered her suggestion amiably enough to Stella.

"If you are going to town what about giving me a lift? I will then do Dick's chores for him, and an errand of my own as well."

Stella turned on her like one of those red ants that not only give sharp nips, but inject picric acid into the wound.

"Who said I was going to town?"

Felicia stared. "Oh, my mistake! Only, cousin Letty wants some Contrexeville, and I thought I would save you trouble."

"But you *are* going to town, Stella!" explained Dick.

"I might go *on there,*" explained Stella, ceasing to be a red ant, and becoming kind and patient, "but I am really going to Clarry de Wilton's, to talk over something very important . . ."

"But town's only a couple of miles further on from the de Wiltons'," Dick began, rising crescendo again.

"I know, Dick," Stella was still more patient. "But I may not have time. I ought to be back here by twelve, the Amerys are dropping in and . . ."

"Oh, I'll attend to the Amerys . . . and cousin Letty'll be up by then."

Stella burst into a sudden rage.

"I wish to God you'd attend to your farming, and leave me to manage my own affairs!" She was crimson. Poor Dick grew even crimsoner, slashed with purple.

"Who the deuce is asking you to do anything, but be decent . . ." he began, but broke off suddenly. Something in the look of her quenched his anger, and brought his wistful, childlike expression back. "Sorry," he muttered, and turning, trudged away into the sunlight. Felicia felt miserable for him, and furious with herself for assisting at the wretched altercation. Stella's selfishness about the car was nothing uncommon, but her general attitude this morning seemed to be as unreasonable as it was unsporting. The whole *fracas* had sprung suddenly out of that, but was over as suddenly it seemed, for having got her own way, she smiled and lit a cigarette.

"This climate tears one's temper to ribbons. I have never known myself so nervy. Don't you find it rotten?"

Felicia's reply was short and sharp: "I never felt fitter in my life."

"Hope you don't mind that I can't take you in to-day. But it would honestly be rather inconvenient. Clarry wants me all to herself . . ."

"I don't mind in the least. It was only for the sake of cousin Letty's Contrexeville that I made the suggestion."

"Oh! . . . *I'll* get the Contrexeville—if it is to be got, which I doubt. *Of course,* cousin Letty must have what she needs."

Shortly after the rumble of the old submarine through the drift, told that Stella was off on her secret service affairs—whatever they might be! Felicia finished her cigarette, crushed a big shady hat down on her head, and went into the garden, whistling for the dogs to accompany her on a stroll. In her pathway lay a sheet of notepaper, and as she stooped to pick it up a curt typewritten line leaped out at her.

"We must settle this thing, Stella. Come this morning. P."

She was more than sorry she had seen the words, realizing at once that this was the note that had come from Tagati, and which Stella had probably dropped in her hurried departure. The one fortunate thing lay in her finding it, for if Dick had done so instead, he might have required an explanation of so curt a command addressed to his wife. But scarcely fortunate for Shonnie herself! Only one more query to add to the night's unanswered one. Only that now at least, she knew which of those two men at Tagati had the right to command Stella Cardross to *come this morning,* and *settle this thing!* That was something to know, for however much it pierced, it cleared Paget Vyner of an unjust suspicion she had long been harbouring. And to do injustice to *anyone* was hateful to her.

Passing Stella's hut, she slipped the note under the closed door, and went her way riverwards, the only real walk there was, for the ploughed lands were too heavy to negotiate, and though the veld stretched invitingly in every direction, she had too poor a sense of orientation to risk a chance of losing herself. Certainly the farm was fenced in, but it covered an area of about fifteen miles, and quite a disagreeable day might be spent trying to find the way home.

However, there was no peace or solitude that morning, even on the river bank, for no sooner had she arrived in

sight of it, than a car came spinning through. Mrs. de Wilton and her young daughter, driven by young Osborne, had dropped in *en passant* to beg for morning tea. Felicia had to tell them about the shortage of bread, of course, and that even her oatmeal cookies had all been "skoffed up." But they didn't mind. Thirst was their simple trouble, coupled with that other Rhodesian attribute, a need to congregate. So she got in with them, and they all drove back together. Young "Biscuit" Osborne was very chic and sleek, in spite of his bankruptcy. A finished product of Harrow and Oxford. Not only that, but the beautiful little new De la Rue Model was his, and he drove it with the careless abandon of one who didn't intend to pay for it. Mrs. de Wilton never took her desolate eyes off him. Some Rhodesian wit had said of her that she drank at the fount of eternal youths! and Felicia was reminded of a maiden aunt who also suffered from this devastating passion for boys, which probably has its origin in some thwarted maternity-complex. Once in a moment of expansion, this perfectly sweet and saintly old lady had said to her:

"I don't know how it is, Shonnie, but the sorrows of little girls never touch my heart. I can hear of the most awful things happening to them and never blench. But if I even read of a little boy being man-handled or ill-treated, I could go out with an axe and do murder."

As they drew up to the house Felicia explained that Stella was from home.

"She left about half an hour ago. Didn't you meet her driving townwards?"

"Not a glim of her," said Hibiscus. "She must have switched off to Tagati—or Poinsettia Pass."

"They're the only places she *could* have missed us by switching to," proffered the Biscuit.

"Nuff sed." Clarry's smile was dry. "Where else is she more likely to be?"

Felicia ignored the innuendo, remembering the lack of

cordiality between Stella and Mrs. de Wilton. Indeed it was supposed to be Stella who had insisted that she be called "compassionate," on the grounds that she had compassion on all who loved her, and had never learned to say No! Naturally Clarry rarely missed a chance of reprisal.

"But didn't you want to see her?" asked the girl.

"Why should I?" Clarry indifferently replied. "I saw her last night at the dance, as much as we ever care to see each other," she smiled. "That is to say just long enough to inflict mutual scratches."

That disposed of the important rendezvous then! Though in her heart Felicia had known all along that it was in need of no disposal, never having existed. But it also disposed of any inclination she had to keep the de Wiltons to beguile her tedium. Instead, they must be got rid of as soon as possible, in case Dick returned. In his astonishment at seeing Clarry, he might question her to his own discomfiture, and Stella's undoing. As soon as hospitality permitted, therefore, she hinted that they were having trouble with the cook. Also that the Amerys were expected. That did the trick.

"No Kit-cat Club for me, thanks," said Clarry grimly. "I am at peace with the world this morning, and don't want to unflex my claws. Besides we are due at the Windham's for lunch, and that, as you know, is ten miles further on. Come along, Biscuit, let's get on with the war."

They dashed off in a hurry. The Amerys did not come, of course, and would probably have been much surprised to learn that they were expected. But Stella was back to lunch bearing two bottles of Vichy. No Contrexeville to be got, she said. Dick congratulating her on her quick run to the Dorp and back, added:

"You couldn't have had much time to gossip with Clarry."

"We fixed up all we wanted to discuss," said Stella calmly, and, while despising her, Felicia couldn't help admiring both formation of phrase and frugality of falsehood. There had

been no opportunity to warn her of the de Wiltons' call, but fortunately no one else knew anything about it, except the natives, who, following the precepts of Lord Chesterfield to his son, never tell anything except when questioned, and even then do not tell all.

. . . . . .

Suddenly a story flared up, and flew round the country with the impetus of a veld fire driven by a 50-mile wind! *The partners at Tagati were not on speaking terms!* Those two, who had been closer than brothers, sharing the same friends, going everywhere together, or rather avoiding together such houses as Patrick Fenn did not visit, and consequently, Paget Vyner would not, had quarrelled irretrievably!

It scarcely seemed possible. People refusing to believe it, yet diligently set to work to try and fathom the truth. Without much success, however. The two men were no longer to be found in company; but, apart altogether, they were as close as oysters, and nothing could be got out of them. Even *those at* Manana were left in the dark, for, whatever the cause of the rupture, the immediate effect was a complete cessation of social intercourse between the farm and Tagati. Daily visits from the partners were cut off as with a knife, the supposition being that each feared to meet the other and so incur (in a friend's house) the obligation of being civil. And report said they never meant to speak, let alone be civil, to one another again. It really sounded childishly ridiculous, and unworthy of two grown men.

At Manana it took some time to get accustomed to this state of things. Stella said scoffingly that it could not last. Dick said the whole thing was a rotten Rhodesian lie. Felicia refrained from expressing any opinion, while the Countess cynically insisted that of course it was true—all Men's friendships ended in rupture—and all women's too, for the matter of that! Every member of the household

found something jeering to say about the fragile quality of David-and-Jonathan bonds, but since both David and Jonathan persistently kept away, and it seemed waste of time to jibe at the absent, all presently withdrew themselves behind a common barricade of huffy indifference. That, at any rate, was the surface attitude assumed for general purposes among themselves, and for protected reasons against the curiosity of neighbours, who, in their delight at the new sensation, ranged the whole gamut of probable and improbable causes for the quarrel and its reaction.

It was natural that Felicia Lissell should not hear half the reasons assigned for the putting of Manana out of bounds. Nor did Stella, if it came to that, for it is a singular thing that things said among men in clubs and hotel lounges do not often reach women's ears unless the clear intention is that they should do so. Men have a sort of freemasonry of silence—among themselves when it is a matter concerning people that they like. But Stella, having lived in Rhodesia for some time, was not without instinct as to what was being said—even supposing she knew nothing more. Felicia had not this instinct to assist her: nevertheless she knew what she knew. Perhaps both had certain inside information that they were not passing on!

Stella, for instance, if (as report said) the quarrel occurred at Tagati the day after the dance, must have been in a position to tell something. Where was she while supposed to be having a heart-to-heart conference with Mrs. de Wilton? Apropos, it was current that Clarry, her daughter, and the Biscuit all expressed conviction that not only was Stella at Tagati on the day in question, but if searched for, might have been found *in the very heart of the row.* This was repeated, rather vindictively, by Mrs. Windham when, shortly after the declaration of war at Tagati, she met Felicia in the Dorp, whither the latter, conveyed in Buffalo Bill's car, had gone to seek more Vichy for the Countess. Being pretty certain in her own mind that the Vichy had not come

from the Dorp, and not desiring to catch Stella out in another lie, she had not mentioned the nature of her errand nor asked what shop to go to. There were only two chemists and Selkiem's likely anyhow to stock medicinal waters, but on inquiry all three answered that Vichy was unobtainable in the town and that she would either have to send to Buluwaya for a case or borrow some from Tagati—the only place in the district that had any! So that was that. Needless to say she wired direct to Buluwayo in preference to calling at Tagati.

Stella was not the only one with secrets. Dick, too, knew things he would not tell. When news first came of the quarrel he had laughed uproariously, declaring his intention of going over at once to find out what it was all about, above all what the deuce the fellows meant by staying away from Manana; and in this spirit of derision, but in friendship, too, and an earnest desire to put all he had of affection into the task of "patching things up between 'em!" he went to the mine.

But after staying away nearly all day, and interviewing both sides, he returned in quite another spirit. It transpired that they would not even eat at the same table. Each had retired to his own part of the house, conducted his *ménage* apart, and when communication became necessary, did it by letter only. Incidentally Mr. Goodreef had laconically stated to him, with the lucidity for which his county is noted, that "He knew summat and he knew nowt." This was the only definite piece of information Dick had to impart, though Stella pressed him hard in the presence of the others, and doubtless much harder in their absence. But Dick did not happen to be one of those who consider it no betrayal of a friend's secrets to "tell the wife." What he could not quite conceal was his sense of the gravity of the situation. Inadvertently he blurted that out at once.

"It's a row to the death," he said. "They'll never make it up." Immediately afterwards he shut up tight, became very

vague and obscure, and would supply neither details nor comments on the "conversations" he had enjoyed. Such reserve *might* imply full knowledge, but somehow Felicia felt convinced of his genuine mystification over the whole thing. She on her part was keeping something back, too. Under no circumstances did she intend to share with others the fact that Paget Vyner had written to her. It was not a long letter, but like everything he did, an emotionally disturbing one, and if he did not actually enter into the cause of the trouble at Tagati, he said enough to make her feel that it was only a matter of time before she would know all about it. Meanwhile she had the respite she had asked for, in which to decide, "uncoerced and untrammelled" by his presence, whether she would "accept the passionate adoration of his heart," and in return "give herself into his perpetual keeping." That was how he put it, with a number of other things that she was glad not to have to read before witnesses. The letter had in fact been handed to her by a young Mounted Policeman who often looked in for a cup of tea on his way to some outpost or native kraal. Having taken Tagati by the way that morning, he had been used, plainly without premeditation, as an emissary.

"Oh, Miss Lissell, Colonel Vyner asked me to give you this!" He produced it quite frankly, and afterwards added ingeniously, "By Jove, I'm glad I didn't forget it and have to ride back again!"

By sheer luck she had happened to be alone at the moment. If Stella had been there she might have exhibited a not unpardonable curiosity, and as Felicia was not very adept at lying—in fact believed very few things in life were worth lying about—it might have been awkward. As it was, she read the letter alone in the seclusion of her hut—not once but very often!

Alluding to the strained situation at Tagati he wrote, "It sickens the heart to think that I must exile myself from your adored face, but in coming to Manana I should probably run

into company I don't like, and I might possibly behave in a way no one would like. So I must possess my soul in patience until the coast is clear once more. I daresay you will know what I refer to. An *impasse* has arisen here which needs all my cool-headedness to deal with. I won't bore you with it . . . just a dispute between two men, temperamentally and traditionally unable to see certain things in the same light . . . but it means great changes, and afterwards things will be on quite a different footing. I hope to settle matters shortly so that when you give me the answer I am aching for—and oh! Heart of my heart, if I am to go on living, it can only be one answer—we can, as you promised, skim away for a month or two, swift and secret as swallows, to that Island of the Blest we know is waiting for us up on the Zambesi."

Sitting in her hut she thought of that Island as he had described it . . . a place of bamboo-fringed edges, scattered great baobab trees and flowering bushes; winding paths, and sheltering branches with little scarlet love-beans dropping from their pods. Soft dry scented grass under foot, butterflies overhead, the calling of brightly-painted birds. The friendly wood-fire not far off, and the little launch moored among the rushes to take them back down the great waterway in the cool of the night!

Yes, that piece of imagery had its song of enchantment to sing. What if in that Island, and with that man of Ireland, she could ease this aching burning pain in her breast? The voice of the wild Lissells in her blood urged it softly, argued that there was nothing amiss with the plan. That it was such a plan as she had always hoped for, and was built to respond to, as swiftly as made . . . even to catching up her hat instantly, even running hatless across the veld, with ardent answers on her lips: "Let us go now; waiting is folly: life is a dream and swiftly over; not an instant should be wasted."

Those were the answers she had always known herself

ready to make to the avowal of the man she loved when he came marching into her life. Love, with him, would be no complicated affair; secret yes, and full of lovely hidden things, yet clear as the noon-tide, flawlessly clear, with the sun shining through it. That had been her dream. But suddenly she had no dream. Or, if she had had, it was gone, lost in a dark mist of doubts and fears; horrible knowledge of secret intrigue; the remembrance of sobs and softly-padding footsteps! Foreboding scorn weighed on her heart with the weight of stones.

A postscript to the letter asked her to let him know if and when she would be likely to go to the Dorp alone (or with the Countess), and he would manage to be there, too. They could meet at the hotel. Neither to this nor any other part of the letter had she responded.

CHAPTER V

And meanwhile it rained. The drought broke one midnight. After that the rain came down relentlessly for hours at a time. Heavy walloping rain, falling in gouts, and clumps, and spouts, so that the whole land seemed to be streaming and rushing with water. Impossible to cross from hut to house without getting drenched. Sheer necessity to "stay put" where you were when it began, until rain ended. Whether or not you like the society you had during those wet spells, you had to put up with it. Two people hating each other, yet forced to be alone together under such circumstances might easily commit murder. It was no wonder Mrs. Windham had a nasty revolver mark on her forehead, as the result of a bad wet season. Farm life at such times can be lonely, confined, monotonous, even hellish. Social amenities cease automatically when roads become too heavy, and swiftly-running rivers impassable to cars. Certainly some traffic continues, for farms and mines have to be provisioned, whatever the state of road and river. Also there are persons who will risk drowning, bogging, mutilation by crocodile, and annihilation by mosquito rather than not see a dorp at frequent intervals. Such folk travel on horseback, if they are lucky enough to have salvaged a horse from the fatal "sickness," or to own a "salted one"; by mule-cart; by Scotch-cart; by ox-wagon; even sitting astride an attenuated donkey. There are also the methods of *per pedes* and the humble push-bike:

"Both good things, brother"—like the wind on the heath!

Such travelling, however, is not done for pleasure, though

it may sometimes be done for whisky. But then whisky in Rhodesia is not a pleasure, it is part of the ritual of life itself to some people: hence the saying that when a good Rhodesian dies he is poured back into the bottle.

At Manana there was no real necessity to suffer from ennui. For such as have mental resources of their own, or any interests apart from the ordinary routine of life, occasional spells of isolation from the rest of the population need not be unwelcome. The wet season might be of the greatest value, for instance, to a novelist or playwright, and certainly the Countess Karamine found it priceless for Memoirs. Felicia on her part had much to meditate upon, masses of correspondence to catch up with, and her study of Sindebele to pursue. Moreover, the homestead was a comfortable one, as far at any rate as furnishing was concerned, with plenty of books, a piano and a gramophone. There was also the garden to work in, whenever the rain ceased from raining. It very often did this. In fact one of the great charms of the Rhodesian summer, which is also the wet season, is the constantly changing *mise-en-scène*. A burst of crystal sunshine and the blackest hour is dispersed, the picture turning, as if by enchantment, to one of almost unearthly freshness and loveliness. Actually, before the very eye, green shoots spring forth and flowers open. Little birds dart out rejoicing. Thousands of insects, and all the big veld birds give tongue. The Ground Horn-bill can be heard booming for glee, while the song of the frog blares forth with the clangour of brazen cymbals.

This was the time for Dick to sound the police whistle with which he always called his helots to their tasks. Presently they would come out from shelter, sad and bedraggled as wet hens, for natives never seem to get used to rain, to resume the business of weeding, digging, stumping, planting and above all, ploughing. The wet season is the only time when virgin Africa is amenable to treatment, so when new lands require breaking up there is not a moment to lose.

The women were always glad to emerge into the radiant air succeeding each rainstorm. Even Stella, though no gardener, would sally forth armed with a garden trowel to attack the herbaceous border, planted at the sides of an eight-foot path stretching from the house to the open veld—nearly a quarter of a mile. Naturally there was more border than herbaceousness.

As for Felicia she delved furiously in the dark earth that gave out fresh ravishing odours, feverishly flinging in handfuls of seed, mignonette, poppies, gallardias, forget-me-nots, stocks, phlox, and pinks, all the sweet English things that bring back "home" to the exile. She had also got permission to start a violet bed, because Rhodesia seems to be the spiritual home of violets; they grow there like great perfumed purple butterflies.

Gardening had always been one of her consolations for living in England, and here was the kind of garden she had dreamed of, six acres of fenced-in land crying aloud for loving treatment! Much to do, but only spasms of time to do it in. No sooner had work started than down would pelt the rain again, and back all must go indoors to the society of their "black butterflies."

However much they strove to occupy themselves, the subtle flutter of those butterfly wings would be heard. Felicia had hers, and did not doubt that Stella, too, had hers, and could hear their melancholy rustling above the roar of rain on the roof.

The Countess's sciatica had to be considered, and as it was bad for her to go back and forth in the wet, the sitting-room was practically given over to her each day. Ensconced in a corner near the fire, yes, actually fires in an African summer to drive away chill and gloom!—with a board across her knees, and a tiny red typewriter perched on it, she would sit clicking away, old memories, triumphs, sorrows, flowing, in streams of little purple letters, from the tips of her parch-

menty fingers. Absorbed she always seemed. But no-one could ever quite bank on that. Letitia Karamine had never been known to be too absorbed to take an intelligent interest in what was passing around her.

However, the real fly in the ointment was Pagg. She, too, weather-bound, had to be always at hand for her mistress's needs, and, with a piece of needle-work from which the little grey eyes were rarely raised, she hovered in the background, modest and self-effacing. Nevertheless the two younger women had an impression of being perpetually under the microscope, and to escape it, were forced upon each other's society to a point almost intolerable, for together they would take refuge in one or other of the stoeps—whichever was free-est from the driving rain. If Felicia found this irksome, Heaven only knew what it was to Stella! She sometimes had the look of a woman who would like to take a hammer and smash everything in sight. Perhaps the cigarette eternally between her teeth helped her to keep control, but when Felicia saw her sometimes stand staring across the rain-sodden veld, straining like a wild hare in a cage, she never doubted that Stella was filled with ravening torment for someone, or something, impossible of attainment. And the girl might have felt sorry for her, even while revolting from her duplicity, if Dick had not used up the whole of her available stock of sympathy. That man did not join them much on weather-bound days. Coming in wet from the lands, he usually went away to his hut on the plea of changing, and once there, seldom re-emerged, except for the evening meal.

One particularly black afternoon, when rain seemed to have set in for ever, and they had the sitting-room to themselves, for the Countess, having gone to lie down after lunch, had never returned, Felicia said to Stella:

"I've got the score of *The Lady of the Rose* here, let's send for Dick and cheer ourselves up with a little music." But the other shrugged her shoulders.

"Why drag in Dick, even if he wanted to come, which he doesn't? He's got whisky to amuse himself with."

"Oh! Stella, I'm sure he'd rather be here than, than *that!* If you'd only persuade him . . . One word from you . . . why don't you?"

Stella laughed: "Thanks for a thankless task!" she said, then in the suavest and sweetest of tones: "You are awfully clever, of course, Shonnie, about men as well as about everything else, but *do* believe me that after ten years of married life, I know my own husband a little better than you do."

Felicia bit her lip, swallowing down a bitter retort, and answering as equably as she could:

"I don't understand your phrase 'clever about men' and naturally I don't profess to know Dick as well as you do. But I like him very much and, forgive me, I can't help seeing that he is (in hell she felt inclined to say, but there was no sense in being immoderate) . . . lonely, and rather at a dead end."

"A dead end!" the other glimmered at her savagely between a fringe of golden eyelashes. "And where do you suppose I am? Do you imagine *I* am entertained, living here at the back of beyond with a man who has let himself go as Dick has, and who will never make money enough to get us away from this rotten farm, or to live any other way than we do! God! I'd go mad if I thought that was all there was . . ." she broke off as violently as she had begun. It was a momentary impulsive flinging aside of the careful veil, but recovering immediately, she clutched it about her again, dropping heavy white eye-lids over the fury of her eyes, and disguising the bitter sneer of her lips under that little secret smile. She lit a fresh cigarette, and continued with smooth cheerfulness:

"However! What's the good of talking like that? Of course one just has to go on, hoping for the best. And if poor Dick *will* drink to drown dull care and general boredom, well! can I help it?" She suddenly became very ear-

nest. "I can assure you, Shonnie, I've tried my best for years to change things."

But Felicia didn't believe she had tried for years, or months, or even weeks. No man living was more amenable to persuasion than Dick, and the woman he loved could have led him like a lamb. But Stella didn't want to lead him. He bored her. Her mind and heart were fixed elsewhere, and it suited her to have him dull his senses with drink, so that he would not observe too much. These were the convictions that surged hotly through Felicia's mind, while still that silver voice chimed earnestly on.

"The only kind thing is just to pretend you don't notice . . . and above all keep it dark from cousin Letty."

"Keep it dark!" Felicia stared. Did she really believe that old eagle-eyed Letty, who could see round corners if she tried, didn't know all about it? Only the day before, a tersely-expressed opinion had proved quite otherwise to Felicia at least.

"Dick drinks too much, has no idea of doing what is right with his money and mine, or of managing his wife. Also he is growing daily more like a buffalo wallowing in a marsh: but he will always remain lovable."

That was cousin Letty's synopsis of the subject, *after a day's absorption in her Memoirs!* Not much got past those worldly old eyes. But here was Stella murmuring on:

"Cousin Letty's money is our only hope. For years this farm hasn't made a penny. To be accurate, it never *has* made a penny, but sometimes it looked as if it were going to—*if only* we got rain soon enough to save the mealies, and the cows; or *if only* it stopped raining before the cotton bols were rotted, or the tobacco crop ruined. Always an *if only,* and always the inevitable overdraft at the bank."

Felicia shrank from this overflow of domestic confidence. It is not pleasant to receive the confidences of people in whose veracity you have ceased to believe. No doubt many of Stella's grievances were founded on fact, but she was an

adept at trimming and embroidering, and as she always kept hidden any aspect of a fact that did not reflect credit on herself, her testimony was, at best, bound to be one-sided. Then again, there was never any sign, as far as clothes were concerned, that she had not a big allowance to draw on for personal wants. The pretty dresses that were always turning up from England, together with the latest fantasy in hats, handbags, stockings, etc., scarcely harmonised with the straitened means for which she blamed Dick. Neither did the commissariat department ever show signs of financial stringency. True, there was invariably some crisis occurring, some shortage of an ingredient essential to the success of a meal, but that only meant bad housekeeping, remedied as soon as a messenger could be sent in to Selkiem's. And fresh supplies, whether wine, meat, tinned provisions, or fresh produce, were always of the best to be got in the Dorp. Surely everything was not being left unpaid for, against the day when the unfortunate Countess should, as the Rhodesian phrase ran, "cash in!" Felicia could scarcely credit it. It seemed to her too horrible that anyone's death should be counted on to relieve a financial situation. Certainly Dick was his cousin Letty's heir, and she told everyone so quite happily, but that didn't mean that she intended to die to oblige him. Felicia found it hard to believe that Dick was only marking time waiting for the hour in which he would get his inheritance of some ninety thousand pounds. If this were true, she was sorry for him! Not only had the Countess the liveliest intention of living as long as she could, but the likeliest chances of doing so. She took excellent care of herself. Sciatica was her only complaint, and as for that, the French call it "the brevet of long life!"

This most unpleasant conversation was brought to an end by the cessation of rain, for which blessing Felicia offered up fervent inward thanks. Once more the sun appeared, and they were able to dash out into the garden and take up their tasks. It is a thing to be grateful for on the sand veld

of Rhodesia, that once the rain leaves off moisture disappears very rapidly. Within five minutes of a downpour it is possible to walk about outside without even wetting the soles of your shoes.

Stella set out at once for the river, the sound of whose roaring could be clearly heard from the house. It rose steadily with each fresh storm, every foot of water cutting them off a little more definitely from the outer world. It could not be for pleasure that Mrs. Cardross stood staring savagely on the banks of the 'Ngamo.

As for Felicia she repaired to her violet bed and kneeling on a folded sack started operations with a dibble. She had planned the position in the centre of a cluster of low-growing *pinus halepensis* which would shelter the young plants as much from fierce sun rays as from a South-easter that sometimes blew very smartly.

After awhile, as she knelt there absorbed in her job of making holes and pressing the little straggling roots home, she heard the voice of Stella, returned from her walk, reproving the boys engaged on various tasks about the garden. Close by, in the orchard, an elderly boy of rather superior intelligence was busy *shagula-ing* (or turning up) the earth round the peach trees, and to him Stella now addressed a phrase of the most distinguished kaffir ever raked out of a kitchen grate.

"Malash . . . *upi lo* dingus on that tree?"

Cut off as they were from her sight by intervening shrubbery, Felicia could not tell what it was that excited the inquirer's curiosity, but permitted herself an amused smile, for literally this sentence contained exactly two native words, and even they did not both apply, as *"upi?"* is a form of "where?" (while obviously she meant "what?"). As for "dingus" it is no language at all. It would have been much simpler to ask in plain English: "What is that thing on the tree?"

However, it is marvellous what perspicacity natives show

in unravelling the mixed and mutilated queries and orders hurled at them daily by people who fondly imagine they are speaking Kaffir. Malash was not particularly intelligent, but his Delphic utterances were always intriguing, if not always true, wherefore Felicia listened with interest for his response.

"It is *isiBunu,*" he replied, *isiBunu* being an enveloping term that can mean not only grub, maggot, or caterpillar, but may cover anything at all in the insect world. This explanation didn't carry enlightenment very far, but he proceeded, as she felt sure he would, to enlarge, expatiate upon, and generally make rings round his subject.

"This *isiBunu* is extremely dangerous and full of magic (*mNumi schelm-tagati*). If for instance a cow, calf, ox, bull, or any beast of bovine breed should by accident or intent eat this *isiBunu,* God help him, for no one else could!"

This (boiled down by Felicia and rendered by him in an English-and-kitchen-kaffir patois simple enough to suit the mental equipment of the white woman), was the gist of Malash's discourse. He then looked at the sky to see the time, paused dramatically and continued:

"It is now half-past three o'clock. A cattle that ate the *isiBunu* at this hour would be dead at sun-down."

"But . . . how *fas*cinating!" murmured Stella, more to herself evidently, than to the Oracle. Then:

"Would it kill a *person* who ate it? Would it kill *me?*"

"Without a doubt," solemnly averred Malash. There followed a silence, from which presently issued the voice of Stella, low and curiously breathless:

"Get it down for me, Malash."

"There are two *isiBunus* on the tree. Which one does the *inkosikazi* require?"

"The biggest one. Get it down quick, and take it straight to my hut (*lo kaya g'mina*)."

About the time that Malash, having carried out this order, returned to his job, with Stella disappeared from the scene

on some business of her own, Felicia had finished bedding out her violets, and it occurred to her that as a change from kneeling, she also would like to increase her store of natural history by any new and curious facts that were going.

"Show me this wonderful *'isiBunu,'* Malash," she amiably requested, coming round the shrubbery upon him and rather expecting him to be taken off his guard by her sudden appearance. But natives are seldom taken off their guard by their employers. Even as they can spot an approaching motor long before anyone else has seen or heard it, they have also some mysterious ability to detect the nearby presence, however silent or concealed of one of the dominating race. Some suppose that they can *smell* the white man. At any rate it is quite certain that, however unconscious Stella may have been of Felicia's neighbourhood, Malash was perfectly aware of it all along. Disposed also to comply with her request in the same spirit of amiability as made. Any opportunity to lean upon the spade rather than wield it is welcome to a native. Malash in fact laid the spade by altogether and assumed the air of a professor.

"Here!" said he impressively, laying a finger on what seemed merely an excrescence on a branch, but which proved to be a little package of the substance and colouring of twigs. She examined it closely. It resembled a packet of tiny cigarettes tightly stuck together. Or rather it reminded her of the packets of Natal cheroots her father used to give to a man servant who had a special liking for them, little miniature Natal cheroots in a bundle, but tight and firm, and with the definite stability of a Mills bomb. This was the thought that passed through the head of Felicia Lissell, who had definite knowledge of Mills bombs from a war collection in her possession, and this was the comparison that entered her mind as she looked upon Malash's *isiBunu.*

"The *schelm-tagati* is inside," stated the learned professor.

"Open it and let me see," demanded the intelligent pupil,

and after some little trouble he managed to detach it from the branch and prize it open. His statement was true. The little packet had an inmate: a dark squat grub lay dormant there, awaiting its appointed hour, and when she saw how beautifully it had been packed, Felicia felt sorry they had disturbed it. Malash informed her, with impossible to compute how much truth, that the *schelm* packs itself, beginning very young, with small pieces of grass and stick, and making them adhere by some sticky exudation of its own. Then, when grown bigger and more elaborately packed, it makes its way by the help of its head and fore-feet, which are able to emerge, to a selected branch, attaches itself, and awaits the mysterious command of evolution. On reading up the subject later, Felicia discovered that the *schelm* was the larva of one of the many moths that disturb the comfort of human beings during the wet season. Its real name in Sindebele is *uMahambanendhlwana* ("goes with his house"). Following the example of Stella, she was inclined to keep the little thing as a curiosity, but Malash became so firm in condemning its sinister qualities that she gave in and allowed him to destroy it by squashing it with his spade.

. . . . . .

There came a break in the wet weather. It was only November still, and those downfalls that had so impressed (and depressed) the visitors to Manana, were merely spring rains, slight affairs, compared to those that would stagger humanity when the rain-god got going in earnest. Meanwhile the skies glowed with a hard unflecked bird's-egg blueness. The sun, a dazzling ball of gold at five A.M., when it set again at six P.M., was coloured a dark and sinister red, as if blood-stained by travel. Thirteen hours of breathless light in which to keep body and temper cool while counteracting thirst! The kind of weather in which the most carping of visitors might cease to wonder why three-quarters of the Rhodesian men drink hard, and be critical only of the

other quarter who profess teetotalism. Weather for a very real appreciation of the twelve to four siesta, and the cool gloom of a closed thatched hut!

Of course there were occasional coolish days thrown in; days when a gentle wind and the moisture from rain in some other province blessed the air, without disarranging the day's programme. That was the time for cars to come trundling through the Drift bringing visitors laden with scandals from the Dorp, the latest gossip of the law-courts, gay tidings as to the next likely bankruptcy! The inhabitants of Manana also went visiting upon such days, or with stores at a low ebb, would dash madly into the Dorp, to replenish ferociously before the rains began again. There was a curious breathlessness about it all, and a very certain pleasure in careering along the freshened roads, the veld, a blaze of green splashed with the gaiety of flowers, the trees spraying their tender tints against vivid skies, and whole stretches of land smothered under the little wild petunia: a strange flower of purest white, growing in sheets close to the earth, giving an effect of snow in summer.

But still no one came from Tagati; and the doings at that famous Mine remained "wrapt in mystery" until one morning Stella declared her intention of going in person to look into the quarrel. She, Dick, and Felicia were at the breakfast table, the only place to launch propositions of any sort, because the Countess, whose habit was to thrust her spoon into any pie and fatally disperse the most promising plans, seldom came to it.

"I shall pop over and back directly after lunch," averred Stella, but Dick, looking glum, said rather brusquely:

"Better leave it alone, my dear. After all it's their *indaba*, not ours."

"I don't see that at all," she argued with more moderation than usually exhibited for her husband's opinion. "They are our friends, and surely it is up to us to try and set matters right? You've done your best, Dicky . . . let me have

a shot now. It's so dreffly dull without them . . . no more Tagati dinners, no dance parties, no nuffin!" She made a pretty petulant mouth at him, and what with that, and the unheard of "Dicky" he melted.

"Well . . . go if you like," he conceded hesitatingly. "Do you want me to come, too?" She seemed to consider this offer carefully before answering:

"Nn—o. Perhaps not. I fancy it would be best for me to tackle them alone."

"You won't get them together, that's certain."

"Then I must get them one by one," she laughed happily.

Just before going off to the lands, when he and she were alone together on the stoep, Dick reverted to the subject.

"Are you sure you can manage the car alone?"

"*That* beast!" her face clouded over. "You may well ask! I *can* manage of course, but why you couldn't be decent and let Tagati give me the two-seater, I don't know!" Dick turned unexpectedly surly.

"Are we going to have that all over again?" She looked at him petulantly.

"Most husbands would be only too pleased to make their wives happy over a little thing like that."

"If a wife can't be happy without taking presents from other fellows she had better stay unhappy," his shortness surprised her without appeasing her griefs.

"Oh quite!" she agreed bitterly, "and since one does without so much, why should one cry about one thing more? Treat 'em rough! That's the proper husband-stuff, isn't it?"

"You know damned well that I consider nothing too good for you and that you will have a new car as soon as I can possibly afford one. If the tobacco crop does as well this year as I hope . . ."

"*If* the tobacco!" she sneered furiously, "*if* the cotton . . . *if* the mealies!" Then with a hard laugh went out into the

sunshine, across the garden to her hut, leaving him standing there looking after her with bloodshot eyes.

. . . . . .

At Tagati she stepped from the car looking about her in impatient annoyance that no one was on the spot to meet her. Where were they all? Surely the rattle of the approaching Underseas must have been heard for miles! Casting a glance around she was just in time to see old Goodreef pop his head out of the Mill door, then dodge quickly back. "Inquisitive old Horror . . . I never liked him," she thought, and almost immediately saw Vyner emerge as if in a hurry, from the same door. Fenn followed at a more leisurely gait and stood for a moment contemplating the scenery. Without waiting for either she mounted the front steps, entered the house, and was sitting on the big leather sofa in the dining room, when Vyner joined her, his air moody as of a man with a none too congenial task before him.

"Morning, Stella!"

"Morning!" she proffered laconically, and considered him carefully thro' the first puff of the cigarette she had lighted. He had just seated himself facing her, elbows on table, when Fenn came in, still at his leisurely pace and greeted her civilly, but remained standing. Planted squarely on his feet, with his hands deep in his pockets, he regarded the visitor with the same impersonal intentness that the captain of a vessel might bestow, from his bridge, upon the ocean at large. Stella looked at him in irritation, Vyner with some heavier passion clouding his eyes.

"Are you two still going on with this insane dispute?" she asked at last. "Why can't you sit down, Pat, instead of standing there. . . ?"

"I prefer standing, thanks," he answered evenly, and paused seeming to muse on his next words, but Vyner, intolerant of delay, addressed her abruptly:

"We have come to a parting of the ways."

"What?" cried Stella startled. The hand holding her cigarette fell into her lap and she stared from one to the other. "Who?"

"Fenn and I, of course," he seemed annoyed at her obtuseness.

"Oh . . . I see," she retrieved the cigarette, brushed away some ashes and regained her composure, tho' her face had gone a little pale. "But how absurd! How *can* you part . . . and why should you. . . ?"

"Oh, we *can* all right," said Fenn. "A mining partnership is not like marriage you know, nothing sacred about it."

Her golden eyes, kindled with anger, but meeting the deliberate and quiet irony of his glance, turned away again.

"Absurd!" she repeated addressing herself exclusively to Vyner. "Absurd, financially speaking, of course, tho' in other respects it's not surprising you should want to end it," she flung a gesture of contempt in the direction of Fenn. But that man remained imperturbable.

"It is I who am putting an end to it," he was quietly informative. "I am fed up with the situation here. All this—" with his right hand withdrawn temporarily from a pocket he made a gesture towards the two of them . . . "is sickening to me, and I don't intend it to go on. Not under my eyes at any rate. Either he or I must clear out—but only on my terms."

Stella stared at him, insolently her lips slightly apart. It was to Vyner however that she turned for elucidation. But in him, sullenness had increased to the extent of giving an impression that his skin had actually darkened, and his eyes blazed with hostility.

"Terms!" he ejected the word like a curse. Stella too took umbrage at it.

"Why should it be for *you* to make terms?" she demanded with a scornful laugh. "I find that fantastic!"

"Not fantastic," was the reply, "because, in law, the Mine

is mine. Everyone knows that I am the senior partner, but not everyone knows that I actually own the option. I've gone halves fair and square with Vyner all along, because I've wanted to, but in reality he's no more than a courtesy partner. I can turn him out at a moment's notice and he knows it. Ask him."

Stella did not ask. One look at the dark bitterness of Vyner's face revealed the truth and she sat back dumbfounded. The even sound of Fenn's voice in her ears seemed for a moment to come from afar:

"Or, I could shut down altogether. But, of course, I should not for a moment choose to do either of these things —unless forced to. There'll be no question of extremes if Vyner observes my conditions. He can either go on here 'buy me out' we'll call it for the benefit of the public—or, I will buy *him* out, on generous enough terms. But things cannot continue as they are. One of us has got to quit."

He finished speaking and stood waiting, reflective and impassive. Stella gave her bewildered attention once more to Vyner.

"But *why,* Padge? . . . since he is reasonable? It seems fair enough. Surely you can't *want* to go on living with him in this state of warfare. . . ?" Vyner's only answer was to jerk himself out of his seat, and stamp to a window on the other side of the room, where he stood staring out. It was for Fenn to explain.

"He doesn't like my terms, tho' as you see, they are financially favourable to him, and really perfectly simple. You must try and persuade him."

"Leave her out of it!" Vyner turned and broke in with savage suddenness. "As I said this morning, you and I can beat this out together. . . ."

"No." The single word slashed like a whip-lash across the other man's argument.

"Why not, damn you?"

"I can't trust you."

They stood glaring at each other across the room with passion-darkened eyes, and it seemed to the woman that at any moment they might be at each other's throats. Feminine diplomacy reasserted itself in her, together with a piercing curiosity that overcame apprehension. She rose swiftly and stood between them, murmuring softly and sadly, like a brook in winter.

"This is terrible! Pat! Do let us try and be calm and sensible. I've had *one* row this morning, and really I don't feel I can stand much more. Come and sit by me here," she caught Vyner's arm affectionately and pulled him down beside her on the sofa. "Now, please, Pat, what *is* it all about, and what are the conditions you are making such a song and dance of?" She added soothingly, *"Of course,* Padge will accept them. I don't see what else there is to do." Vyner at that began to laugh, blithely and recklessly. It was not a good sound.

Fenn addressed him calmly.

"Will you tell her? . . . or shall I?"

"Oh, go to Hell . . . and leave us alone!"

"I don't intend to leave this room until Stella has been told the truth," Fenn said with finality. Suddenly Vyner turning to the woman beside him said rapidly, and with intense amusement:

"The fool is in love with Miss Lissell, and thinks I am in his way!"

"O . . h?" the word issued from her lips thoughtfully, in a still small voice, like a sigh. Vyner continued loudly:

"Wants me to get out . . . and leave him a clear field!"

"I said the truth," Fenn warned him.

"That's true enough, tho' you may deny it till all's blue," sneered Vyner.

"I haven't the remotest thought of aspiring to Miss Lissell's notice," the sailor's tone kept a hard level. "But I don't intend that *you* shall lay your soiled hands on her fresh young life." Looking directly at the woman on the

sofa he continued inflexibly. "That is the condition, Stella, . . . the only one of importance—I forbid him to make love to Miss Lissell." There was a silence after that. Vyner continued smiling sardonically, but no one spoke until Fenn took up his theme again.

"If he does . . ." for the first time he seemed to have difficulty in producing words, but only for an instant; regaining himself he went on with a certain cold violence:

"If he does . . . out he goes, neck and crop! I can't take back what he has already had, but never another penny will he get out of this Mine."

"Money!" jeered Vyner insultingly. "Money! That's all there is in the world apparently!"

"No," retorted Fenn, softly. "There is honour, and good repute. Not only *yours* to be considered either . . . remember that!"

Stella sat up very straight and white as a bone. He had given her a look of deadly significance.

"Pat!" she said breathlessly. "You wouldn't sacrifice *me?*"

"Yes," he answered, "I would."

She cried out with a sob. "I can't believe it, Pat! I can't believe it."

"You *can* believe it, however, for it is true. Not only that, but I'd sacrifice Dick, for whom I care as much as for any man. I'll sacrifice the lot of you, rather than let that girl suffer."

Stella jumped up and caught him by the shoulders, staring into his eyes.

"Why? . . . what is she to you? Tell me that." He smiled stonily.

"What could she be to me . . . a nobody . . . a man without a name?"

"Women have loved you, tho', in spite of that," Stella had grown very still and subtle.

"Have they?" his smile developed into a short laugh. "I doubt it."

"Don't say that, Pat," her voice had a strange warning sharpness. "You *have* been loved; and you have loved too —illicitly, but not the less truly."

He loosened her hands from his shoulders, and held them for a moment, speaking heavily:

"All the more reason why a girl should have no use for me, even if everything else were all right. My hands are dirty, too, like his. But," he looked past her to the Irishman still sitting smiling devilishly, "not in the same way, by God! I have never soiled friendship! . . . Shaken a man's hand while I stole from him!"

"A spotless Galahad, in fact!" was Vyner's bitter sneer. "The white flower of a blameless life, and all that!" But Stella still clinging to Fenn's hands was gazing at him wonderingly.

"You *love* her!" she repeated, and seemed overwhelmed with the surprise and misery of her own words.

"I tell you, Stella, that Miss Lissell will never hear a word of love from my lips. What I am standing out for is essential right. It is not fitting that that fellow should go to such a girl, straight from his intrigues with . . ." he stopped short.

"Yes . . . say it," she urged in a desolate voice. "Straight from his intrigues with . . .?"

"With another man's wife. My gorge rises at it."

"Yes . . . you love her," said Stella with an aching mournfulness, but almost immediately she changed, and laughing shrilly flung a vulgarism at him. "You have a hope!"

"I have never dreamed of a hope!" he said and since she appeared to have finished with his hands, he replaced them in his pockets.

"She considers you less than the dirt beneath her feet," taunted Stella.

"I am quite aware of it. So now, since we all know what we are, and where we stand, I'll leave you. No doubt," he

looked at Stella, "You will be able to help Vyner make up his mind."

And from the door he threw back a last word.

"Twenty-four hours to accept . . . or clear out."

. . . . . .

At Manana, that evening the mistress of the house did not appear at table, and Dick explained that having got back from Tagati, she had gone straight to bed with a frantic headache.

"Afraid struggling with that infernal car did her in," he was slightly incoherent as well as lugubrious. "Ought never to have let her go off in it alone."

"Didn't she tell you the result of her visit to Tagati?" demanded the Countess, who, if the truth must be told, had left the seclusion of her own hut for the special purpose of hearing these tidings. She had lately come to the conclusion, that "something on a tray" provided by Pagg, and accompanied by that vinegary virgin's mordant cackle, entertained and nourished her more satisfactorily than the ordinary meal in the dining room. Therefore she only emerged for dinner when she could be certain of visitors. She was missing the Tagati men sorely.

"Didn't tell me anything," muttered Dick as tho' intoning a dirge. "When she has one of those rotten 'heads' she sometimes can't speak for days."

"Too bad!" commented the Countess in an ambiguous tone, and with a contortion of mouth and nose that might just possibly be mistaken for a facial expression of grief, tho' not by anyone who knew her. Fortunately or unfortunately Dick was too saturated in gloom and whisky to notice. He had been on the lands all day, staying away from lunch, and only returning when he heard Stella's car in the Drift. After a visit to her hut, from whence he doubled back with the speed and discomposure of a man looking for a Pasteur-Institute after being bitten by a mad dog, he had spent the rest of the time up to dinner in profound Sundown-worship,

"lowering it like a man" as the Rhodesian phrase runs—not the sun, but bottled nourishment. It seemed a pity that (to use another local euphemism) the price of living should at that time be eleven shillings a bottle! Felicia, who had been a sad witness of his pagan devotions, very much doubted whether he was now in a position to heed or understand anything said at the table, except in so far as it happened to relate to the sorrows populating his own mind. He certainly took no interest in the discussion between her and the Countess, on the merits and demerits of an invitation they had just received from Salisbury. The Governor's wife had bidden them both in charming and hospitable terms to come and stay at Government House, holding out as a lure the Opening of Parliament, with Official Ball, Flower-Show, and Gymkhana, attached. In spite of these attractions Felicia did not feel particularly drawn to the idea. Politicians, raw, red, and newly-fledged had no more call for her heart, than drawing-room heroes. As for the noble Countess she lifted her nostrils like a war-horse, scenting, but not accepting battle.

"My sciatica is too bad," she declared with finality. "I could not possibly contend with the nightmare of fuss and formalities that calls itself life in Government Houses all over the world."

"I think probably you are flattering Rhodesia," smiled Felicia.

"No, no, my dear, they're the same everywhere. I know them well! And the pottier the place the worse the airs they put on! No thank you!" And she repeated firmly, "My sciatica is too bad." Of course she would write a marvellous letter next day, full of flowery phrases, old-world courtesy and melancholy regrets: but meanwhile her eyes were malignant with glee for boredom missed.

However her fiat very well suited Felicia, who had her own reasons, tho' she would have been hard put to it to state exactly what they were, for wishing to remain in the

curiously depressing yet physically stimulating atmosphere of Manana. With all its discomforts and drawbacks, it had an enchantment of its own, and often it seemed to her that the place had something hidden for her, something vital and essential to her continuance in life at all. Perhaps it was some great happiness, perhaps some fatal purpose of which she was a part! Impossible to know. Frankly, she could not guess. She must just wait upon Fate.

"Don't forget," she reminded the Countess, "that you half-promised to go with me to-morrow, to lunch with the Beak and his wife at the Residency."

"Beak! my dear, you are becoming horribly Rhodesian in your slangy talk!"

"Well, the R.M. then . . . tho' you must admit, Cousin Letty, that said Rhodesians are remarkably on-the-spot in their expressions and aphorisms. I think 'Beak' a good word for our Magistrate, too. With his keen profile, thoughtful, shrewd, dark eyes, and general air of power, he reminds me of a beneficent eagle."

"I hear, however, that he and his wife pull each other's hair out when they have nothing else to do." Cousin Letty produced this choice morsel of gossip with a relish worthy of the oldest inhabitant.

"Only when the moon is full," contributed Dick, unexpectedly, instantly subsiding again into the dark pit of his thoughts.

From the glance of ancient wisdom cast at him by his august relative, Felicia realised that the Countess was well aware of his spirituous condition, but there was no condemnation in the glance, only compassion, and she went on talking as tho' she had noticed nothing.

"Beak or no beak, I shan't go to the Dorp to-morrow. My sciatica! . . . besides, I am now engaged on a most difficult part of my Memoirs—the Constantinople period—and cannot allow myself to be distracted."

So Felicia went alone, given a lift in by Angela Windham,

who also was due at the Residency lunch. Everyone gives everyone lifts in Rhodesia. It is one of the pleasant features of life. People will take a lift into town from someone in the morning, on the off-chance of getting one back again from someone else in the afternoon. Even natives will come to a farm and ask for a place in the back seat, or the dicky, and usually get it, if the farmer knows them (and there are no white passengers) though sometimes they get a flea in the ear instead.

On starting Angela invited her to take the wheel, observing gloomily that she would rather be killed in a motor accident than any other way. She was always morbid, poor soul, under her cloche hat, but from a woman who had already tried to blow her brains out, this seemed to be in the nature of a slight skid from veracity, as well as an unwholesome frame of mind, so Felicia determined to cheer her up by doing the run in record time. Fifteen and one half miles in 37 minutes.

"O'er stump and stone, o'er crag and torrent, ti . . . hill
The dri-hive, is duh-hun!"

as she hummed to herself most of the way. Not bad going! and she felt justifiably pleased with herself in a modest way, as she drew up with a flourish before the Midland. The world and his wife were congregated there of course, for the usual purposes of tea and gossip, and first and foremost, Paget Vyner stepped out, eager-eyed to welcome them. Felicia had in fact known he would be there, since a note to that effect had mysteriously found its way under her hut door, sometime before dawn. But certainly it was not in response to his fervent prayer to see her, that she had come, since the "fixture" with the Beak had been made at least a week before. Among a collection of people that included Father Drago, the Amerys, de Wiltons, and various other neighbours and acquaintances, it

might for some have seemed impossible to achieve a *tête-à tête* conversation. But not for Paget Vyner. Felicia could not but admire the art he displayed, in managing, even in that crowd, to get her to himself. The twisting of a chair barricadewise, a rigid expression instilled into his left shoulder, a certain aggressiveness of profile, one eyebrow and a corner of the mouth kept for raising in cold enquiry at encroachers, were some of the things that helped do the trick. It must be conceded however, that Rhodesians are not without *nous* in matters of this sort. They tumble to a situation pretty rapidly. Also, most of them have little *indabas* of their own to conduct. Useful word, *indaba!* covering most things *à deux,* from a council of war between Captains and Kings, an argument in the kitchen between Jim the cook and his Missis, or a lovers' dialogue. *Indaba* must be added to the vocabulary of those who have already acquired *voetsack* and *Ikona.* No good student of the native lingo "as she is spoke" should be without it!

This particular *indaba* suited Felicia Lissell's book very well, because though it was almost *tête-à-tête* it was also distinctly in the public eye. The last feature was what she liked best about it. She desired no more declarations from her companion, yet was consumed by a curiosity that only he could assuage, about the situation at Tagati. But he apparently had a number of things to mention first, including bitter reproaches that she had only written to him twice, and that when she did write her notes were brief and cold, no *real* answers to the ardent letters which he took immense pains to have transported to her in so secret and mysterious a fashion that none ever saw the messenger.

"And by the way," she interrupted firmly, "you mustn't do that any more please. It gives me a creepy feeling to find letters in my hut without knowing how they got there."

"It is perfectly simple. I have a boy who is a wonder at doing things like that without anyone seeing or suspecting him."

"But I don't like clandestine things—"

"Don't you, Shonnie?" he threw the wistful lilt into his voice. "I thought we were at one on that . . . the beauty of secrecy between lovers. . . ."

"We are not lovers, Paget . . . please don't forget that . . . ."

"*I* am," he murmured, "and you—

'Lady, you are the cruellest she alive—'

Shall I finish the quotation?" he asked with a mischievous smile.

"No thank you," was the hasty answer. "Tell me instead —does Tagati intend to stay away for ever from Manana?"

"May I take that as an admission that you miss me?"

"We all miss you, of course" she said cheerfully. "Stella was only saying this morning how dull it is since Tagati cut us."

"Oh—Stella!" he made an almost imperceptible movement of impatience, and it is possible that the lady might not have been flattered at his tone. But immediately afterwards lighting Felicia's cigarette for her, and one for himself, he resumed his usual blithe manner.

"Things will shortly be settled at Tagati . . . and happier than they've ever been."

"Cheers! How soon?"

He leaned forward so eagerly that she thought he was going to tell her something of real importance.

"As soon as you come and take command," he said, then dropping his voice, added with an audacious smile: "when we are married."

She frowned. How tiresome he was, always harping on one string. Taking so much for granted, too!

"We were talking about Tagati."

"And so am I talking about Tagati—as it's going to be in the near future. As for Fenn, he and I are parting."

"Oh! . . ." she did not know why her voice sounded startled. He looked at her attentively.

"You are surprised?"

"I scarcely thought, somehow, it would come to that."

He was silent for a moment then said with quiet significance:

"Gold-mining makes strange bed-fellows!" She stared.

"I thought you were such friends?"

"Not really. It was the Tagati luck that drew us together."

She didn't know why it should vex her to hear him repudiate his friendship with Patrick Fenn, especially when it only confirmed her own secret impressions.

"People always thought that you liked him so much . . . and were such real friends."

"So we were—so I did, but . . ." he hesitated. . . . "One's tastes change perhaps . . . or one's opinions. Living with a fellow opens one's eyes to lots of things one never noticed before."

This implication was, she considered, too much in his own favour. She regarded him with careful coldness. His eyes were full of amusement.

"I don't know why you should be so surprised? Separation was bound to come when one of us fell in love—which is exactly what has happened."

"Which one?" she asked, not maliciously, as she wished him to think, but from a sheer pain which thrust suddenly thro' her heart like a needle, forcing out the words.

"You know well enough which one." She hastened from that danger point.

"I can't help wondering that either should be willing to give up his share in the magic gold mine," was the first thing she thought of to say. He answered rather shortly.

"Not much giving up about it. I'm buying Fenn out—and at a stiff price, too."

This was still more astonishing, and she longed to press

for further details, but felt she had asked quite enough already. Too much perhaps! Ashamed of what might seem suspicious curiosity she now wished to drop the subject altogether, but this he would not permit before exploding another bomb.

"Twenty-five thousand pounds and Poinsettia Pass thrown in, as part of the price of his going."

"Oh!" she cried astonished, and had a swift vision of that incomparable stretch of loveliness, that beflowered place of enchantment, wondering how any gold mine could make up for the loss of it.

"To tell you the truth I didn't particularly care for the place, and its memories. . . ."

"Memories!" she echoed. It seemed to her too fresh and pristine to have memories attached to it, especially sad or bad ones. He corrected himself hastily.

"Oh, well . . . I mean, that it has no particular memories to make one want to keep it. Do you mind, though? If I thought that. . . ."

"Mind?" She interrupted curtly. "It has nothing whatever to do with me."

"It has *everything* to do with you," he urged gently, "and a case of peace at any price. I don't care what Fenn gets as long as he clears out, and leaves Tagati for you and me when we come back from . . ."

She flushed furiously, then went rather pale.

"Colonel Vyner, once and for all, I must ask you not to take me for granted in this fashion. I have given you no right, and never—"

"For God's sake, don't say anything irrevocable. Forgive me! I know I am foolish, but I can't help counting on . . ."

"You *mustn't* count on me. I have said so all along. . . ."

She got up suddenly. It was ridiculous and impossible to sit there arguing *sotto voce,* trying to make people think they were discussing ordinary topics, while they were really dis-

puting. She wanted an end to it, and was thankful to see Angela making a move. When he found that they were due at the Residency he angled frankly for an invitation, but Mrs. "Beak," otherwise Mary Beverly, a haggard burnt-up woman with merry eyes, laughingly refused him, saying that he would make thirteen and she wasn't going to have that at any price.

"Very well then, I shall wait here on the chance of seeing you afterwards," Vyner murmured in Felicia's ear, but she pretended not to hear, and as they parted merely remarked somewhat mischievously that she was looking forward to hearing soon, the result of Stella's mission to Tagati the day before.

"What mission?" he looked strangely startled.

"To get things back as they were between you two, of course . . . in *statu quo ante bellum.*"

"They will never be that," he spoke with what seemed unnecessary violence. In fact his tone was quite ferocious.

Evidently too, he abandoned his plan of waiting, for the "Beak," who was late for lunch, reported having seen Fenn drive up to the Hotel, and a few minutes afterwards Vyner skedaddling out of town so furiously that he (the Beak) was in two minds whether or not to have him arrested for dangerous driving.

. . . . . .

Stella had not made an appearance before Felicia left the farm, and it later transpired that no one had caught a glimpse of her throughout the day. It really looked as if Dick's prediction of a week's bad "head" was in store for her. However, to the relief of everyone, especially of her husband, she turned up for dinner that evening, and Dick, overjoyed, dug up a bottle of champagne from somewhere, to celebrate the occasion. The Countess also arrived *en grande tenue.* But after all Stella had nothing satisfying to relate.

"It's no good as far as I can see," she averred sadly.

"Both of them are ill-tempered and bitter, and not in the least likely to make it up."

"They can't go on living like that!" protested the Countess. "It's ridiculous. Something must be done."

Felicia waited, expecting every moment to hear Stella tell of the impending break-up of the partnership, but she merely shrugged her shoulders. Dick turned dark and moody again. It was plain that the state of affairs made him thoroughly miserable. Felicia glancing at him, suddenly decided that if Stella wouldn't tell *she* (Felicia) would.

"They are *not* going on living like that. Captain Fenn is leaving."

"What!" cried Dick in loud surprise, and Stella turned on her with a gleam of green in the golden eyes:

"Who says so?"

"Colonel Vyner told me to-day, and I don't imagine there is any secret about it. I should have thought he would have told you, too."

Stella flushed scarlet, and it was instantly plain that whatever she knew, she was surprised to hear of the meeting in town, and she could not keep fury out of the eyes she fixed upon Felicia.

"But Fenn owns half the mine!" cried Dick. "Their interests lie together."

"Fenn is being bought out."

"Phew! That'll cost Padge a pretty penny. Personally I wouldn't take a hundred-thousand for half a share."

"He is going out for twenty-five thousand, however," Felicia thought she might just as well unburden her own amazement while she was about it.

"It seems very little!" commented the Countess who thought in millions, until it came to tipping a waiter or a porter, when she thought in sixpences only.

"He must be mad!" declared Dick. "It's less than they clear in four months, at the present rate of going. I never heard of such a fool thing in my life."

"Fenn must want to go very much to put his departure at such a very low figure," was the Countess's sapient comment.

"By Jove, yes!" Dick stared astonishedly from one to another, and last of all at his wife, who kept saying nothing except a few untranslatable things with her eyes in the direction of the revealer of these exciting tidings.

"I wonder where the gallant Captain is going . . . and what awaits him there?" continued the Countess in a dry tone, and she too, looked in Felicia's direction. But the latter's fount of information suddenly dried up. It had occurred to her that Patrick Fenn's acquisition of Poinsettia Pass was entirely his own affair, and one neither in her province to disclose, nor theirs to discuss.

"I can't get the hang of it all," muttered Dick. "What do *you* say, Stella?"

But Stella remained mute. The only live thing about her seemed to be that curious green glow in her eyes. Felicia had once before seen that peculiar light in the eyes of a cat that had been accidentally poisoned, and remembering this now gave her a most disagreeable sensation. She heaved a sigh of relief when the meal came to an end. But, in the drawing-room while Stella made coffee in an absent-minded fashion, (Dick having been temporarily left with his reflections and the port) the Countess unexpectedly continued the attack.

"Colonel Vyner seems to have unbosomed himself to you very completely, darling child," she remarked with a slyness that the "darling child" thought entirely out of place, so that she retorted with a certain amount of spirit:

"Since we've all been dying to know the developments at Tagati I don't see why you should complain if he did."

The Countess smiled the smile of a witch.

"Oh, we're far from complaining," she sweetly observed, "on the contrary your gratitude is unbounded, isn't it, Stella?"

Stella looked for a moment as if she'd be very happy to

knife the questioner, but apparently decided to join forces with her instead.

"Rather," she said heartily, "only we haven't heard enough. Surely there is more to come? Didn't Padge tell you all about his plans for the future, my dear?"

"If he did," Felicia replied, looking her calmly in the eyes, "I scarcely think he expected it to be passed on."

Touchée for Felicia. She didn't want to be brutal, but if Stella *would* cross rapiers she must take the consequences.

"Here's Dick," interrupted the Countess and hindered further developments of a promising engagement by throwing a hand grenade:

"We will play Bridge."

All souls groaned in unison, all lips sighed. Bridge with Countess Karamine was pure inquisition. She never played for less than five shillings a hundred, which is high unless players are of equal ability. But who could hope to be equal to the ability of that ancient in revoking, dropping hints, undercalling and declaring she had corrected herself in the same breath, grabbing back cards already played, even getting back cards from tricks already turned. There was always one person at the table actively hating her, and that was her partner. The other two were frank gloaters until their turn came, and then they were full of venom.

At the end of an exhausting evening, as Felicia, thankful at last for the refuge of her hut, undressed before her mirror, she said to herself, mordantly:

"What a lot of fun you are having in this enchanting country, my dear!" And she got into bed making a strange little noise, something between a laugh, a sigh, and a sob.

Instead of fun she had problems to solve, instead of enchantment, that pain like a needle being thrust through her heart!

. . . . . .

Early morning tea had first to be made in the back stoep

by whoever was up earliest, a beneficent task usually performed by Dick, sometimes by Pagg or Felicia, and, upon rare occasions, by Stella. Afterwards Jim would take the trays and leave them at the door of each hut.

On that particular morning Felicia was inclined to call down blessings on the head of the early-riser, for she herself had passed a sleepless night, and longed for the rousing stimulus of tea. On rising to fetch it from its resting place on the mat she opened the door an inch or two and looked out to verify a shrewd suspicion that had been forming in her mind by reason of an uncanny silence in the bird-world. She feared the worst, and it was even so. The skies were slatey, and between them and earth hung a fine veil of grey mist. The rains had set in again with a deadly intentness. More long days of close confinement! More uncompanionable companionship! She had felt it in her bones, and though the air was anything but cold, she gave a goose-flesh shudder as she set down the tray by her bedside. The cosy china pot, blue as English larkspur, brought a bright note into the dullness, and she reflected as she hopped back between the sheets, how easily the human spirit is uplifted or cast down by trivial things. Blue always cheered her up, somehow, and these same blue bed-room tea-sets . . . half-a-dozen of them—had been among the household gifts the Countess and she had "shopped" for Manana before leaving England;—the china from Liberty's, the little round trays of white polished wood, made by disabled soldiers, at the Lord-Roberts-Workshops in the Brompton Road.

A thin slice of bread and butter lying beside the tea looked particularly inviting, and as she began munching it her thoughts ran something after this fashion:

"It must be Pagg's morning up . . . no-one cuts bread-and-butter like that old crone. Delicious! Oh, dear, this wet weather! . . . one might almost believe oneself in one's bed at home. It ought of course to feel like a bluish springish Rhodesianish morning, but it is managing to feel much

more like a greyish autumnish English one! It only needs a pile of letters and the morning papers by my cup to think myself back in Sussex, waiting for Sancie's voice as she draws back the curtains:

"'Seven o'clock, Miss Shonnie.'

"'Oh, Sancie, it can't be, *yet!* I've only just put my head on the pillow!'

"'Why, Miss Shonnie, you went to bed at eleven o'clock! For what a one you are for sleep to be sure!'

"She wouldn't say *that* if she could have seen me tossing restlessly all last night. Ah, me!

"Sing me a song of a lass that is gone,
Say could that lass be I . . . ?

"Stevenson knew something about the changes and chances of this mortal life when he wrote that little song! It was not for girls, but what's the odds. We're the same as boys when it comes to misery or joy! What has become of my capacity for peaceful, childlike sleep, and the heart that used to sing in my breast like a bird at break of day? However, I'll pour out my tea, and perhaps melancholy will pass!

"What a pity there are no morning letters and papers on Rhodesian farms! It would be nice . . . instead of only a weekly 'buster' and one important post . . . the English mail. Even then one has to drive fifteen miles for it, and find everything cramped up together, letters, parcels, papers, in a pigeon-hole of a box. Civilisation has some advantages after all! Oh, Lord, what can be the matter with me this morning? Haven't I had letters enough lately, too? Letters by a mysterious and unknown hand. Ha! I think I've put a stopper on *that* little custom anyway.

"What a lovely amber colour the tea is, as it comes from the spout! Cousin Letty's fragrant Orange Pekoe! Hope to goodness her stock lasts out our stay here . . . Don't care much for that stuff from Selkiem's. *Is* this Orange

Pekoe, though? Doesn't smell very fragrant, I must say! Nor taste fragrant either . . . *What the deuce* . . . ? it's mouldy . . . bitter . . . Jim, you lazy devil you! . . . couldn't have washed yesterday's tea leaves out of the pot! Yes . . . that must be it! What else could give such a filthy flavour? Shan't drink any more of it, anyhow . . . would be sick if I did. Would *surely* be sick. But how maddening! Just on the one greyish autumnish morning that my soul yearns for tea! Wonder if by any remote ghost of a chance I've got a few leaves left of the pound I had on board. In my dressing-case it was. Hurrah, yes, and I know there's some meth left in my spirit lamp. The little kettle will boil up in two ticks. . . . Hurrah again, and cheers! Shan't be cheated by Master Jim's lazy ways after all! Shall feel like 'one John Smith' once I've had my cup of tea. *Must* clean out the tea-pot first, though. Nice little tea-pot, but smells extremely funny. Funnier still with the lid off . . . and what a bundle of stuff inside! *Really* a bundle . . . a lump of something . . . something like . . . Now where on earth have I recently seen something resembling a miniature packet of Natal cheroots? But of the consistency—as I said to myself at the time—of a Mills bomb! Ah! of course!! The *'isiBunu!'* Malash's marvellous *'isiBunu'* that could kill a beast between three o'clock and sundown. The *'isiBunu?'* Yes. But how could that horrid squat thing, brown and dormant, come to be cuddled at the bottom of this little blue tea-pot? Dead, of course, scalded to death by the water that made the tea. And if I had drunk the tea would I have been dead, too? In three hours! Probably. But why . . . ? *But who* . . . ?"

. . . . . .

At breakfast, for the second time running, Stella appeared. Not a very inviting morning to get up early, but perhaps she thought to give her husband and Felicia a surprise. She did not say so, however—only that she had a lot of letters

to write. At lunch time, when the girl appeared promptly and in her usual excellent health, perhaps the surprise was with Stella. Felicia imagined so, anyway.

They were alone. Dick was off on some lay of his own, and the Countess had decided to stick to bed and Memoirs for the day.

"Mine enemy is delivered into my hand," Felicia thought, and looked curiously across the table at her hostess. Not that there was much to be done about it. If some-one tries to poison you with *tagati* in the tea-pot what can you do about it? . . . unless able to pin the deed absolutely to where it belongs! And it would be a clever one who managed to pin anything to that subtle smiling woman, with rather weary amber eyes, seated at the head of the table! But at any rate it ought to be revealed to her that she could not expect to do such a thing, and "get away with it" without risk of detection at least. On the other hand, if by any chance Felicia were mistaken in her unkind deduction, that, too, would be revealed.

There were curried eggs for lunch, in a lake of golden brown gravy surrounded by hills of rice. Stella placed a helping on a plate and passed it to her guest, but she herself sat idly finicking with a fork.

"Aren't you going to have any?" asked Felicia.

"I don't think so," she reached carelessly for the butter and biscuits. "I'm not very hungry."

"Then I am not either," said Felicia, firmly, and pushing back her plate reached out in turn for butter and biscuits. Something in either tone or act made Stella look up enquiringly, but she offered no comment. It was Felicia who presently broke the munching silence.

"You won't mind, will you, Stella," she said gravely, "if in future I make my own morning tea? . . . and in my own hut?"

The butter knife Mrs. Cardross happened to be using slid

with a dull clatter into its dish, but her raised eyebrows expressed nothing more than an impolite boredom.

"I don't mind *what* you do in your hut . . . or anywhere else," Felicia chose to ignore the insolence and continued pleasantly:

"That is satisfactory then. I shall be getting up earlier than most people, as I intend to start a new study." After musing a moment and munching more biscuit she added, "The study of insect life in Rhodesia . . . in its relation to human beings."

A slight pause followed before Stella drawled out with ineffable indifference:

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed," pursued the intending student, "but I shall collect my own specimens, and not need anyone else's assistance." She made the statement so significantly that, for a moment, a startled flicker crossed the face of her listener, but immediately afterwards it resumed its expression of complete ennui with the subject. Felicia deciding that a stimulus to interest was indicated suddenly produced a rolled-up handkerchief, and laid it on the table.

"This morning," she said, "some-one very kindly tried to further me in my investigations, though I don't remember mentioning this before." With a deft movement she exposed the contents of the handkerchief, tipping them out at Stella's elbow. "How far I was to be furthered I don't quite know. Possibly," she smiled gravely, "into the next world!"

Stella was staring at the deceased *isiBunu* with a puzzled frown. She even stirred it slightly with the tip of her finger, but as to her face, not a blink or a blench rewarded the steadfast gaze fixed upon her. She appeared genuinely mystified.

"What is it?" she asked so simply that but for one thing Felicia would have been bound to acquit her of all knowledge of it.

But that one thing happened to be the overheard conversation with Malash, and the very fact that she now simulated ignorance of the tiny bundle she had then examined and discussed so intently gave a sinister turn to the affair.

"Have you forgotten it so soon?" came the quiet question.

"Forgotten? What *are* you talking about, Shonnie? And what *is* that rubbish in the handkerchief . . . ?"

"Isn't it the *isiBunu* Malash got off the peach tree for you yesterday?" asked Felicia coldly, and at last drew blood! Stella's shell-like complexion gave evidence of an emotion that the alert mind behind it would have denied. A bright colour showed for a moment in her cheeks, then receded, while she bent and examined the thing on the table more closely.

"Oh!" . . . she exclaimed at length. "Of course! . . . *that* thing!" Then with slow and growing surprise. "But I thought I told Malash to take it to my hut? I wanted to keep it as a curiosity! How did *you* get hold of it?"

Felicia gave a long sigh. The strain was beginning to tell upon her clear and honest mind.

"Is it really necessary for me to tell you that?" she asked in a low voice, and looked at the other wonderingly. But Stella, far from feeling strain, had now got her second wind.

"Not if it bores you, my dear," she cried, and with a sudden bright trill of laughter rose from the table. "Never do anything that bores you, is my motto . . . though, alas, I am not always able to live up to it in this cursed country."

. . . . . .

Later in the day Felicia reopened, with the Countess, the question of the visit to Salisbury. For, after all, as she told herself, however much you may like a place, it is just as well to give it a miss, for a time at least, when you suspect your hostess of trying to "do you in" with *tagati* in the tea-pot. In the light of recent happenings the Salisbury proposition began to look like a Heaven-sent loop-hole by which to

escape for a couple of weeks from very present unendurabilities. However, the Countess, with no such cogent reasons for altering her decision, stoutly maintained herself to be too unwell to make any change in present arrangements.

"There's little enough comfort at Manana," she pronounced tartly. 'But at least I have grown accustomed to the squalid morass, and am sunk into it with a certain amount of entertainment to myself." With an attic grin she quoted a childhood's tag that seemed to her appropriate:

"In muddeele-Zar;
In claynun-Nar!"
(In mud eels are; in clay none are!)

Felicia in turn quoted the more classic example which also seemed appropriate—to Manana meals!

"Hairily-doats,
Marily-doats,
And Kiddle-e-divey."

(Hare will eat oats, mare will eat oats, and kid will eat ivy.)

She added ironically, "I must say you certainly represent, at this minute, the last word in squalid misery!"

With piles of newly arrived books, papers and magazines, at her elbow; typewriter and knitting to hand; and jars of freshly-cut spring flowers all round her, she sat popped up in bed amid the multitudinous gay cushions she always "travelled" with her, a boudoir cap of pale blue silk and pink *bébé* roses perched upon her permanently-waved locks, blinking those faded blue eyes, shrewd and malicious as an ancient vulture's while Pagg, another vulture, but not such an amusing one, hovered over all.

"However, if you don't want to go, Cousin Letty, would you mind very much if I went alone?"

The old woman eyed her quizzically.

"The unconforming Shonnie yearning to return to a world of formalities."

"Not so very formal, I hope," smiled Felicia. "After all this part of the world was virgin veld about 30 years ago and must not be classed with India, or Persia, or even Turkey, which I understand was the scene of *your* worst outrages against convention . . . what?" The Countess grimaced.

"My dear, as I said before, these out-of-the-way holes are really worse at social monkey-tricks than the great centres of the world. In the British diplomatic circles of Constantinople, for instance, one did find something worthy of one's steel, to make up for the wearing *ennui* of ceremony . . . However, do as you like, child. Go if you think it will amuse you."

"I think it will be better . . . for a time, at any rate," said the girl.

She did not feel inclined to unburden herself of the strange occurrences passing beneath the surfaces of life between Stella and herself. Certainly not with Pagg there, her large ears acock. Also, she neither wished to upset the Countess, nor have an open breach with the mistress of Manana. To that lady, no doubt the tidings of her guest's projected departure would come as manna from Heaven. No further need, for the moment, to experiment with poisons of the insect world! Thus reflected Felicia, in the early heat of indignation at being made the subject of such experiment. For how could she think otherwise when so many pieces of the puzzle fitted so accurately to form an ugly picture. But with cooler moments, natural generosity and an incurable belief in the inherent decency of human nature supervened, and she found it difficult to take the matter seriously. It seemed too impossible that Stella had really been prepared to go as far as *that!* After all, she *looked* like a woman,

not a monster! And though she had shewn herself to be possessed of infinite variety in cattiness, faithlessness, unkindness, even treachery, it did not follow that she was capable of an act of downright *premeditated* evil. Felicia began to feel ashamed of herself for having even thought it, and ended by making out a case for the defence. Probably, she argued, that tall-tale pitched by Malash as to the death-dealing properties of the *isiBunu* had not for a moment been taken seriously by his mistress. Natives *do* pitch weird and woolly tales, without a word of truth in them; Stella *might* have concluded from his dramatic recital that the swallowing of "*isiBunu* Extract" by anyone unwise or unsuspecting enough, would be followed by mildly unpleasant effects—and to see someone you disliked wriggling in the throes of something like seasickness would perhaps not be an altogether disagreeable sensation! But even in this supposition Felicia felt she was not being quite just. For there was the undeniable possibility that Malash had never taken the *isiBunu* to her hut at all. True, he had left his work for that purpose and had afterwards returned. But who was to prove what he had done in the interval? He might have thrown it away. Some other boy might have picked it up! How, in any case, it had eventually got itself into the tea-pot was of course another puzzle. At any rate, she determined for her own peace of mind to question Malash as to what he had really done with that mysterious specimen of the class Hexapoda. But in this she was disappointed. He was nowhere to be found in the garden, and upon enquiring for him of Fritty she was met by a furtive and downcast look.

"*Malash u hambili,*" was all she could get out of that urchin, so she applied to Dick, who happened along at the moment, for information as to the professor of natural history.

"Malash? Oh, I've sacked him for cheeking Stella. Something or other she told him to do and he didn't, and

when she rebuked him, it seems he got cheeky about it. A pity! Seemed a good boy up to now. But of course he had to be bounced. I can't have disrespect to Stella."

So that was *that!*

. . . . . .

Very few days elapsed before everyone knew the terms of settlement between the Tagati partners, and furious discussion of its pros and cons went forward. Most people were lost in admiration of Vyner's unsuspected perspicacity, and indeed that he had got the best of the bargain was pretty generally agreed. Admitting Poinsettia Pass to be one of the loveliest spots in Rhodesia, and five thousand acres of it at that, the consensus of opinion held it to possess merely a sentimental value compared with one of the richest small mines ever fluked on.

Sentimental or not, it seemed that Patrick Fenn had put his twenty-five thousand pounds into the bank, and betaken himself to his new home, leaving Vyner in complete possession of Tagati, and the world, or that part of it living in the Midlands of Rhodesia sat in quivering anticipation of what would come next. For surely *now* at last the secret must ooze out, of *what* or *who* the row was all about? Naturally, *cherchez la femme* was an insinuation that continued to be generally expressed; in fact some people, so far from wasting time in *searching,* definitely put a name to the lady, though careful not to do so in the presence of Dick Cardross.

Between that man's home and Tagati a further spell of silence, assisted by the weather, had fallen. Neither of the partners had come to ask his advice, before their final cleavage, and bitterly mortified to hear the news at second-hand, he sulked about the farm and drank harder than ever.

As for Stella, she kept her own counsel, filling in time by taking an unprecedented interest in household affairs; wherefore the cuisine was worse than ever, and Felicia thanked her stars to be packing up for flight to Salisbury. Right up

to the moment of departure she was careful to look into teapots, and at table never to eat of any dish not partaken of by her hostess. She did these things with a certain amount of self-reproach, but self-preservation is the most powerful of human instincts, and easily outweighs politeness, and even the sense of justice.

And while she packed she pondered on the latest news of Tagati, with which *she* at least remained fairly *au courant,* as far as one side of the dissolved partnership was concerned. Spite of mystery letters being forbidden one more had found its way into her hut, though there was a promise in it that it should be absolutely the last offence in this line. Vyner wrote that he was off within 24 hours to the Cape, the reason given being that Fenn's withdrawal of his possessions had denuded the Mine house to an extent that needed repairing.

"As sole owner," the letter continued, "I can now furnish the house to my own taste, and intend to fill the gaps with really good old Cape-Dutch stuff from down below. I consider the Mine 'good enough' for another three or four years' output (at least), and it behooves me to make the house a pleasant and comfortable place to abide in during that time, and one that I hope a woman, THE WOMAN, will not disdain too much. I may be away for anything between a month and six weeks, so that, much against the grain, you have the further respite you asked for from my petitionings. And though it will be a rotten time for me, I shall try to fill it with useful preparations and happy anticipation. Besides, and here is the whole secret of my consolation in departure, the Countess said something to me, the last time I saw her, of beginning to weary of Manana, and that any moment might see her packing up and setting forth Cape-wards once more. What a glorious issue to all afflictions if this should come to pass, and we three meet again in Cape Town during the next few weeks! It would solve many problems, and

make all things clear sailing! I might even go on home with you, if you and she would permit. Failing this happy issue, which is of course almost too good to be expected, I shall return to Rhodesia, and count on putting into practice my original plan of spiriting you away from Manana to be swiftly and secretly married (as we agreed would be sweetest and best) by the Beak . . . and then Ho! for the Zambesi! Darling, forgive my presumption if presumption it be. I cannot help counting on my balance in that Bank of Hope on which all my future hangs. *A propos* of Banks—(and more presumption, perhaps, but I can't help it!)—I shall have papers drawn up, by which every penny I have or hope to have in this world will be settled on you, as my wife. Once more, forgive me!

"I shan't put any Cape address on this, as *I don't want an answer.* Sheer cowardice this, but I simply could not get through the time if any hard-hearted, or even half-hearted response came from you. It's all or nothing with me. And if the answer were 'Nothing,' and came by letter, it would finish me. I'm not man enough to take 'No' from you, Shonnie—or, if I must, it shall be from your lips. But I can't and won't face that contingency. Till we meet then, Heart of my heart, and may God keep you.

"Paget Vyner."

"I wonder how much he really believes in the God he invokes to 'keep' me," she pondered. Somehow she had come to the conclusion that Vyner had no very great spiritual depths. However, it was a good enough letter from the man one loved—*if* one loved him! But fascination is not love, as she very well knew. One blessing was that she had no address to which to send an answer to the letter, for there was only one answer she could possibly send, and she hated giving pain. True, he would meanwhile be living in a fool's paradise. But on the other hand, one never knew what might intervene, during a month's space, to soften the blow.

Besides, he might not *really* love her as much as he thought he did. Like many another Felicia found it easy to think up excuses for the avoidance of giving pain, and incidentally, of dealing out a dose for herself. Also, since she had become a Rhodesian, she had learned the true value and anodyne of that sweet word "To-morrow!"

Evidently, Vyner, before leaving, had heard no whisper of the impending visit to Salisbury, and she was glad of it, for he might have changed his intended destination, and that would not have suited her at all well. She felt she needed complete separation for a time from the present *galère*. Even the society of the Countess began to lose its grim humour, for that lady had commenced to be morbid over the fact that she was so seldom able to attend Sunday Mass. Fulfilling this religious obligation had hitherto lent new zest to the continuance of her turbulent career. After a week's tantrums and bickerings with Pagg, she felt an absolute need of a fresh supply of grace, and the worse she had been the more ardent her desire to fulfill her religious duties. True, a holy Sunday was invariably succeeded by a malicious Monday, tantrum-Tuesday, and waspish-Wednesday, but what matter, with another Sunday looming close? However, on account of the rains, the weekly drive to Father Drago's Mission had had to be suspended time after time. Fenn, whose task it was to drive her there, never failed to write on each occasion, even since the Tagati row, explaining that only the state of the roads detained him, . . . and, as well as the roads, there happened to be a strong little river between Manana and the Mission. But now that he had gone to live further away, she expressed despair of ever getting to church again, though Dick did his best to reassure her.

"Pat's a man of his word. You can take it from me he'll be round as soon as the weather permits. *Next* Sunday probably."

And, behold! it was even so. Sunday dawned in loveliness. It was also the day scheduled for Felicia's departure,

and driving into the Dorp, with Dick, to catch the train, they met Fenn, on the crossroad from Poinsettia Pass, licking up distances in his shabby but efficient little red roadster. Of course the two cars drew up cheek by jowl, and Dick, purple with mingled pleasure and indignation, got his oar in first.

"Well! . . . You're a nice one! By George, you are!"

Fenn, greeting them both, smilingly, took the large proffered paw and shook it affectionately.

"Glad you think so, old man . . . But you know how things have been." That was all. Thereafter perfect peace and understanding between them! How different, thought Felicia, to a "making up" between two women. What a heap more protestations and explanations would have been exchanged, with possibly not half the unity of purpose. Still, knowing what she knew about Fenn, contempt came into her eyes as they rested on him. He looked brown and clean and hard in his white silk shirt, a red rosebud stuck into the buttonhole of his old grey coat. He might have been an honest man sitting there, if she didn't happen to know otherwise! They exchanged one long, searching regard, each pair of eyes seeking knowledge, but giving none away. After that she looked no more for fear of that needle-thrust whose operations she had begun to know and dread upon her heart. As for him, leaning easily on his wheel and talking to Dick, the picture of her had stamped itself upon his brain. Cool and sweet, all in white, like an armful of delicate lilac, there beside Dick; her bird's-wing hair shining under her hat, a big amethyst on a slender chain shifting and glinting with every movement of her soft breast. He was well aware that the proud eyes after that first glance had looked away from him, ranging the veld, resting on *anything* rather than him. Blue-green eyes, deep and mysterious as the sea he loved, with gifts and promises in them. But not for him! He thought of "the face that launched a thousand ships," and said to himself that it must have been such a face as Felicia Lissell's. A face to follow round the world

on winged feet . . . or broken feet. But not for him! As on that day when first he saw her he detected contempt in her, pride of breeding, insolence of race. And not for him was such a girl. He said it in his heart, without humility and for a second his eyes seemed blinded with the blood roaring behind them . . . blood of anger, bitterness of spirit, raging mortification; disdain and hate of those worldly standards from which he had always had to suffer, that put him "out of the running," and took a man not for what he was but for what his forbears had been. And if he had *no* forbears? . . . then God help him! for he was Mud. Rank mud to be trodden on, kicked out of the way, or passed by on the other side by the delicate and lovely feet of the world. Curse the world and its standards! His lean hands tightened on the wheel, his lips took a bitter twist as of a man tasting gall. Suddenly he was aware of Dick's voice, quizzing him on the red rose in his coat; and his own, answering:

"The roses are ablaze at Poinsettia . . . and, by the way, I'm giving a housewarming soon, and want you all to come over."

"You bet we'll come," replied Dick. "Unfortunately Shonnie is just off to Salisbury for a fortnight. Perhaps you could put it off till she comes back? . . ."

"Oh, no!" Felicia interposed hastily. "He mustn't dream of putting it off for me."

"I wasn't thinking of giving it immediately, anyhow. *Must* wait for an old pal of mine who's coming to put in a couple of weeks with me, presently. Randal . . . *you* know him, Dick."

"What, the Doctor fellow who used to be in the Navy with you? Rather! Rattling good chap. Glad he's coming. Bought a practice in Salisbury, hasn't he?"

"Yes. You'll probably meet him there, Miss Lissell."

"Oh?" said Miss Lissell laconically. On which Fenn twirled his wheel hastily.

"I'd better be getting on, I suppose. Mustn't keep the Countess waiting."

"No, indeed!" agreed Dick. "Unless you want a hullabuloo. She's got a rod in pickle for you as it is."

"I *should* have come over for her before, of course, if it hadn't been for the rain."

"All right, all right," Dick was busy starting his car. "We believe you, but some people may not. Save your breath to blow on your wounds, my boy. You'll need it." They parted laughing, Dick shouting back at the last minute:

"Stay on for lunch after you bring my revered Aunt back. I'll be home as soon as I've tucked Shonnie into the train."

"Right!"

It seemed to Miss Lissell that everything was going to be "Right!" and as usual, at Manana, as soon as she had turned her back on that eccentric spot, and she failed to find any consolation at all in the reflection.

CHAPTER VI

People in Salisbury, Felicia found, were either better off for money than the Midlands crowd, or pretended to be, which came to much the same thing. At any rate they "spread themselves" to enjoy life on a slightly more extensive scale; could apparently afford to give fairly luxurious private parties and subscribe to many more public ones, and certainly housed themselves more elaborately, if not more comfortably than their struggling compatriots elsewhere. Even such adjuncts to felicity as butlers and housemaids existed in some households! As to residences, some stately, some extremely commonplace, all shared one common trait: a passion for seclusion. However small a house might be, it was set acres apart from any other and resolutely secreted amidst a smothering of trees, bushes, and creepers, as if with the stern intention of hiding its domestic and other doings from the neighbours: as well it might, being in Rhodesia! But as a result of this policy, together with the extraordinary width of the red, dusty roads, the impression given is of an immense waste of space. A visiting journalist once wrote maliciously that the town of Salisbury appeared to have been laid out for the benefit of rickshaw boys, no one else could possibly profit by the vast distances lying between residences, offices and shops. But that was in the good old early days. Rickshaws are deader than mutton now, and only owners of cars need apply . . . the latest brands of Saloon and Sedan at that!

The fact, too, of the place being the seat of Government makes it busier and more important, in the estimation of its

inhabitants at least, than any other Dorp in the country. Though Felicia was perhaps fortunate in broaching it at a season not solely dependent upon the charms of said inhabitants, who, in other parts are referred to as a "sticky lot," and in even less flattering terms. The district settlers and farmers, however, constitute a different proposition. They really possess one bona fide reason for being pleased with themselves and grateful to life, in that *their* part of the country can boast of a regular rainfall, so that some of them, at times, actually make a little money on their tobacco, cotton, and mealies! These people, lured by the show, races, and political interests generally, had come surging into the capital, bent on amusing themselves and in forgetting for a time at least, the difficult problems left behind and presently to be returned to "on the farm." Among them Felicia made many new friends, for they were the kind she liked; the very salt of a young country; bright, breezy men and women, who though having a hard time of it, with very little money to spin along on, were making the best of things, and at least wringing a very certain enjoyment from the stimulating climate and the free-and-easy veld life. People who did not live in a country only to abuse it, but considered Rhodesia, with all its drawbacks, "good enough."

Among other intriguing personages encountered was the statesman Smithers-Corbett, subject of that epigram heard on the night of Felicia's arrival in the Dorp. And there was also the Judge, whose famous retort to his medical man was one of the hoariest bon-mots of the country. For when the doctor earnestly abjured him in the cause of a normal blood-pressure, to eat an apple every time he *fancied* he needed a drink, he had indignantly replied:

"Eat an apple every time! . . . My *dear* fellow; do you take me for a beastly cider-factory?"

Unfortunately neither of these classical "old-timers" was at his best just then, the exigencies of health, politics or whatnot having enforced upon them a short period of exer-

cise upon that dearest of vehicles, the water wagon. It would have been pleasant to meet the statesman in this bouncing magpie mood instead of with his blood-red moon of a face solemn as an owl's. As for the Judge, unaware that Felicia knew the fruity story about him, he talked to her gravely about the prospects of the country, and how its inhabitants had been shamefully traduced by modern novelists who made out that they were an idle dissipated lot.

"All lies," he protested earnestly. "People don't drink here at all."

Then, too, the Governor and his wife, a charming pair, had culled and collected into their inner circle all such interesting human specimens as were to be found locally; there were good horses to ride, and interesting attractive places in the surrounding districts to ride to. On the whole, a blithesome ten days had quickly sped! Whatever thrills of pain and sadness Felicia might suffer at moments of allowing her mind to slip back to Manana and its neighbours, there was no use in pretending even to herself, that she had not had quite an agreeable time in Salisbury, enjoyed a number of amusing flirtations, absorbed a most solacing amount of adulation, and hung her belt thickly with scalps.

Castleton had turned up, from Kenya, too; and Castleton in the first days of turning up from any part of the world was always good fun. Only when he started harping on his "one ambition in life" had she ever found him a bore. Certainly it happened to be the one ambition he had been faithful to in his whole existence, but that was probably only because he had never encompassed it. But it did not make it any more attractive to Felicia, its unwilling object. He had wanted to marry her since she was sixteen and he twenty-six; but she had resisted, and meant to resist to the end, the lure of his fresh-coloured complexion; upstanding 160 pounds of best British beef, quite adequate brains, ancient earldom, landed estates, and notable ancestry. Simply because neither singly nor in lump did they represent any

lure for her at all, though she was always being urged by her relatives and friends that they *should* do so. Lord Castleton was a nice young man to look at, but his morals were not quite as fresh as his complexion, and Felicia, though not supposed to know this, was well aware of it, and had no intention of linking up her fate with such an one. No. As a friend she liked Nigel, but when it came to mating, he was not her man. As long as he understood *that,* all went well between them, but when he became "ambitious" it was time for one or the other to go. Usually it had to be Castleton, but on the last occasion *she* had managed to be off with the Countess, after which the most recent news of him was of a tussle to the death with a rogue elephant in Kenya. Of this, however, he gave no outward sign in Salisbury, and was on his best behaviour: and, than Nigel, without the marriage-bee in his bonnet, none could be more entertaining refreshingly, though quite consciously. He and Randal, the ex-naval Doctor, a sulky, brainy man, who pretended not to like women but was a great favourite at Government House, had contributed in no small measure to the fun of the Salisbury interlude.

All the same, the novelty of the place and its inhabitants was beginning to wear a little thin, and by the night of the Race Ball, a crowded, turbulent and pompous affair, given at the biggest hotel in town, Felicia had come to a state of thanking God that her fortnight was nearly up. True, the Governor now designed a trip to Inyanga, desiring her to be one of the party; and as this would mean staying on an estate that had been owned and planned from the first by Cecil Rhodes, she felt a certain leaning towards the proposal. Especially as nothing and no-one at Manana pressed for her return. She had scarcely had a letter from there since leaving, and everyone as far as could be judged, without news, seemed to be getting along very nicely without her. She did not know that she wanted to go back either. Or to remain in Rhodesia at all. Her present mental attitude was that for

two pins she would, at the termination of her visit to the Capital, take train for the East coast, and get out of the country by Beira. It would be deserting the Countess, of course, but when the Countess had more than a score of times in life proved herself capable of surviving *any* desertion but Pagg's. And it would not be very agreeable to go back into Stella's unwilling and unwelcoming radius!

It was while dancing with Randal at the Ball that she meditated these things, deciding that the taste of life had gone distinctly flat, that the world was stuffed with sawdust instead of star-dust, and that the Countess, wily old bird of wisdom, had not been far out in her pronouncement that the pottier the place the worse its social antics. With which opinion the naval Doctor expressed himself in cordial agreement. It was indeed his favourite topic. He never ceased railing upon himself for having been such a fool as to buy a practice in the benighted hole. It must have been "for his sins," he declared.

"I had hoped to find something—not exactly in the Wild West line, *that* would be too much to expect, from a British community!—but at least a fresh and free existence with the wind blowing through it; the adventurous type of man, and something more or less than the ordinary social type of woman, battling audaciously, even outrageously, with new conditions. But alas, it's the same old crew, and the same old game! People living beyond their incomes and breaking their necks to 'keep up appearances' and keep in the swim. And such a swim!"

"It *is* sad," agreed Felicia, "but I suppose its name is Progress. Salisbury was once all you dreamed, the camping ground of adventure and adventuresses, and life a gay and amusing tussle. Strange, outrageous and heroic deeds were all in the daily round of those early days, of which the few 'old hands' left in the country speak so wistfully. These people you see now, all vying with each other to be the best-dressed, give the best dinners, make the newest cock-

tail, and own the latest kind of car, are the after-comers that always push along in the wake of pioneers, and come in when the rough has been made smooth for them. They bring the stale old ways of cities with them, one more wild spot is added to the list of 'civilized places,' and Progress waves its flag."

"I would not mind so much," grumbled Randal, thoroughly enjoying himself, "if we had the comfort and entertainment of civilization. But bar watching the petty competitions you mention, and being drawn into them, too, beyond one's means, what is there in it of amusement for a reasonable man? No Music, no Theatres, no Art . . . and not even the outdoor life and merry feminine society one was led to expect as compensations for these omissions! As a man said to me yesterday:

" 'If you go out for a day's shooting, some rotten shot is liable to bump you off into eternity, as happened here not so long ago; if you buy a horse to ride, it immediately dies of the horse-sickness no-one has yet learned to cure; and if you take a wife she either wants to go "home" every year, or runs off with some fellow better-looking or better-off than you are!' "

"I don't see why you should worry about *his* troubles, anyhow wait till you have similar ones of your own," said Felicia, laughing into the lugubrious sun-tanned face. He was made of the same baked brown rock as Fenn, only with lighter eyes, small and penetrating, and hair—unlike that other man's rough black mat—thinnish and sandyish. A thoroughly able, competent, not too-good tempered, but sound and reliable Briton, whom scientific training had raised above average thinking level, and years at sea had given a taste for the wilds. "Why didn't you settle in the Midlands instead? *There,* at least, a little early barbarism pleasantly survives."

"Wish to the Lord I had! Anyway I am off there to-morrow, thank goodness. When are *you* going back?"

"I don't know. My plans are for the moment in the air . . . or wherever it is that the knees of the gods are kept." She answered somewhat crossly, for afar off she espied Castleton looking for her, and wished heartily that he would look after his duties instead. Ropner, the Governor's Aide was down with flu' and Castleton had been roped in to deputise, but he only seemed to do it well when it comprised bringing messages for her, most of which he invented himself. "Let's escape to the grounds, if there are any," she urged Randal, "I'm sick of this heaving mass of humanity!"

"So am I . . . septic lot!" he agreed heartily, and succeeded in piloting her out to a quasi-sylvan seat among some skimpy shrubs and trees that she feared would be of little avail against the hawklike eye of Castleton. The Hotel being new, and the garden in its infancy, the bosage had not yet arrived at the local standard of secrecy. However, they settled down pleasantly enough with iced-cup and cigarettes aglow, the Doctor reverting to his planned itinerary for the morrow with such passionate enthusiasm that he might have been suspected of trying to inflame his companion with a like ardour.

"It's one of the best short runs in the country, and just the weather for it. Keep moving and you keep cool. My Crossley *can* move, too, and I'm giving a lift to Yank Breddon, an ancient mighty hunter and a tremendous card. He's terribly shy of ladies but has more defunct lions to his credit than any man in this country, and he can catch a fly on the wing, nips it out of space between his thumb and finger, just like winking."

This catalogue of attractions made Felicia laugh hilariously, especially the fly on the wing.

"I'd love to see him do it!"

"Well . . . there's plenty of room in the car. He's a great fellow too for finding wild-honey. Claims he can hear a bee hum, or drop to its cache at a quarter mile distance. I

believe him too. I wish you'd been ready to come with us to-morrow, Miss Lissell!"

"I wish I had," she sighed, "it sounds infinitely more amusing than anything I'm likely to do here!" She felt the more wistful in that through the trees she spotted the ubiquitous Castleton sleuthing her down with a purposeful look in his eye. A conviction pierced her that this was one of his "ambitious" nights. But when he reached them it was a relief to see that he really had a legitimate mission, for in his hand was one of those orange envelopes that ordinarily have such a fateful look.

"This has just come through from the Midlands for you, Shonnie; and H. E. thought you ought to have it at once, but I've had to search the earth for you!" He glowered at Randal. She tore open and read the telegram, then looked up with an exclamation, for her wish had been granted almost as soon as voiced. It was a telegram of recall! The wording of it seemed hurried and slightly obscure, but of its meaning there could be no doubt. . . . The Countess was ill . . . *sinking* . . . wished urgently for her return . . . could not understand why she had not come before!

"How could I, when I didn't know?" she questioned her audience.

"Didn't know what?" enquired Castleton, staring, but she in turn was staring, computingly, at Randal.

"Did you mean that about giving me a seat in your car, Doctor?"

"Of course!"

"Well, I gratefully accept. I'm wanted back at the Cardrosses at once; and don't suppose for a moment there is a train to be got."

"Not a hope of one till mid-day to-morrow," proffered Castleton. "But what's this all about?"

"Cousin Letty is ill and wants me!"

"I shall be only too delighted to take you!" proclaimed Randal, "and we can leave as soon as you like. Breddon

and I had planned to start before dawn anyway, and everything is quite ready."

"I must go and ask Lady Maddox if she has any objection —but I'm sure she won't have—and I'll be ready within the hour," Felicia sounded, even to herself, rather breathless. Was it possible that in her ache to get back to Manana she welcomed even the illness of the Countess, since it provided an excuse for setting off in a hurry?

"Good!" said Randal in a satisfied tone that annoyed Castleton. "I'll be off and speed things up!"

"Oh you will? . . . wonderful fella' aren't you?" said Lord Castleton bitterly, and without any of the grace and polish that should fitly distinguish the manners of a peer.

"Don't be rude Nigel," Felicia chided him, "Come and find Lady Maddox for me. Show yourself a real *Aide,* my dear, not an imitation one!" She jollied and jibed the sulky fellow back into a semblance of good humour and was far from astonished that, being a born tracker, he knew exactly where—among all that heaving, dancing, eating, drinking, laughing, flirting assembly of bodies and souls—to find her hostess: in a snug little alcove, busy, with three other cronies, at a snug little game of bridge. The Governor's lady was a large, handsome and placid woman whom nothing ruffled except to be torn away from a good rubber, and exactly on the entry of Felicia and Castleton she had picked up a glorious hand, gleaming with a "hundred aces" and an astonishing galaxy of royalty. It *did* seem hard that the Countess Karamine should be taken ill precisely at that moment . . . for that was the gist her preoccupied brain managed to gather from Felicia's low-voiced communication.

"Most unfortunate!" she murmured, more to her hand than to her guest; but when she found that all the guest pleaded for was permission to slip quietly away without disturbing the party up upsetting anyone, and pop off to the Midlands in Doctor Randal's car, she was all sweetness and benevolence; gave the expedition her blessing, offered her

maid's company if that would be any use (politely but firmly rejected) together with the free services of the temporary Aide-de-camp, Lord Castleton; sent her love to the Countess, and, as Felicia and Nigel unobtrusively withdrew, bellowed triumphantly: "THREE No Trumps!"

Ensued for Felicia a record hustle. She did not attempt to do anything about her baggage which Castleton promised should be sent promptly after her, but merely flung a few things together, and got out of her ball-dress into serviceable travelling kit. Well within the hour, somewhere around two A.M. she was at Randal's gate where the big Crossley waited. Castleton, very disgruntled at not being invited to be a member of the expedition, threatened to come along very shortly in his own car, which unfortunately for him was for the moment "laid up." Felicia received his proposal coldly.

"I can't prevent you from staying in the Dorp, of course, Nigel, but you will understand that with illness at Manana they won't want visitors, and you mustn't dream of coming there till you are asked."

He mumbled and grumbled, casting baleful glances at the third member of the party, an immensely tall, thin man, clad in a scrupulously clean shirt, and most reprehensible trousers. By the dazzling white-light peculiar to African moons it could be seen that not only were these nether garments ragged at the rims, but distinctly holey all up the legs. At the same time, a certain keep-your-comments-to-yourself expression in Yank Breddon's firm light eyes, and a general air of being well able to take care of his dignity even if wearing no trousers at all, called for civil recognition, not to say politeness. The old hunter gave the impression of standing no more nonsense from human beings than he would from lions.

Felicia gladly conceded to him the seat next the driver, tucked herself in comfortably at the back, and they were off. Tomorrow it would be different, and she might want a change and the relief of conversation, but for the moment

it was well to be alone and have time to think out this matter of Cousin Letty's illness, and ponder again over the puzzling telegram. One word in the message worried her:—*Sinking!* Whatever it represented that had an ugly look! Then, too, what was the meaning of Dick's statement (for the message was signed by him) that the Countess had been surprised at her not coming before? It looked as though there had been a message which she had never received. But how could that be? Impossible for any letters or wire to go astray in an official residence like Government House! Yet it was true that with the exception of a short note from Pagg, written at her mistress's dictation about three days after Felicia had left, she had received no news of any sort from Manana. Of course Dick never wrote letters . . . and she did not expect or desire any from Stella. Neither was there any need for the Countess to answer the long and breezy accounts sent of the Salisbury visit. Still, the girl *had* been rather surprised, for the old termagant not only liked getting letters, but enjoyed writing them. It looked then as if she must have been ill all along. But sinking? . . . Sinking! The word rang ominously! However, no use meeting trouble half-way. Time enough for to-morrow's revelations when to-morrow came!

They were skimming along at about 30 miles an hour, quite good going for Rhodesia, and tho' under Yank Breddon's direction they had taken the longest route—187 miles instead of 159—to keep off big towns and avoid crossing certain rivers, that had nasty little habits in the wet season, it was nevertheless the best road in the country, because of its constant use by members of Parliament. Just as the train Felicia had travelled up by, for the same reason, provided the best food and beds she had yet found on a train in Africa. They could get things for themselves, these members of Parliament! Did they get them for their constituents too? She meditated upon the conclusions she had formed during several visits to the House, while watching and

listening to the speakers representing various parts of that wide, and in many ways, wonderful land. Did they realize what their opportunities were? Or were they for the most part just sitters upon the political fence, tools of their party, seekers of place and position and the fleeting glory of inscribing M.P. after their names? They had *looked* a thoughtful body of men. But then most men can manage to look thoughtful as long as they keep their mouths shut! It's when the tongue begins to wag that the emptiness of the brain-pan is revealed. Certainly the tongue-wagging she heard had been of no staggering import, but rather, a droning-forth of banalities, potted phrases, collections of bromides, little "trimmed up" speeches, and *nuda veritas* soberly hung with calico! In vain did she cock her ears for the introduction of some of the big burning questions with which surely such a country must be racked? And without wishing to carp, or "refuse merit to earnest desire" she had found herself unable to recognise among them a forceful personality, or anyone equipped with that "lively dialectical imagination" that Mr. Birrell describes as being Dr. Johnson's great asset. The one woman member, pretty and alert, struck a single note of fervour in a crowd who seemed anxious not to strike any note at all. She thought of Rhodes and Dr. Jim, and how the very presence of such men would have lit up the assembly. It seemed a pity there were no giants left! But are there ever, among those who come in the wake of pioneers, for whom the rough has already been made smooth? She thought it a pity too that some of the younger, more live-wire men with whom she had been in contact during her stay, were not sitting there, legislating for their country. But no doubt it was the same old story as in older countries . . . the young, the ardent and the brainy, struggling for existence and without the means for a political career, were obliged to leave such things to those with money and leisure . . . mostly retired professional and commercial men, who, however able in their own line, could scarcely be

expected to have the gift of statesmanship, nor the valour and enthusiasm of youth!

The night was beginning to pass, the witch-like eerie light of dawn, to creep across the skies, blanching the moon to a stranger whiteness, veiling the stars, and throwing into prominence strange shapes of things by the roadside . . . giant rocks like dropped meteors; fantastically shaped trees—some like immense parasols, others resembling large spring mattresses held aloft on a single supporting stem; occasional kopjes, bare and lonely. Showers had fallen somewhere, and the air was clear and sweet with the faint suggestion of new-mown hay and lilies-of-the-valley . . . another of Africa's myriad illusions, for both lilies-of-the-valley and new-mown hay are rare as nightingales in that part of the world.

Just as the sun burst forth in splendour from the edge of the world, rising like a wakened king from a golden couch, and trailing clouds of crimson glory, Randal called a halt for morning coffee, and Breddon nipping out of the car with incredible quickness for an old man, flitted about the veld like a giant dragon-fly for a few minutes and returned with an armful of fuel. Felicia, expecting nothing better than coffee from a thermos, was agreeably surprised to see instead woodsmoke . . . than which there is no more enchanting odour in the world . . . curling to heaven; and soon, a kettle of water bubbling over a most practically-built fire. Yank, long years before he came to Africa, had been a Mounted Policeman out West, and as Randal said, what he didn't know about campfires and out-door life generally could be written on a postage stamp. While they breakfasted on delicious coffee, and super-sandwiches which the Doctor freely admitted having "pinched" from the Ball, Yank recounted an adventure with lions encountered on that very spot some twenty-five years before, when the road was little more than a grass track. The sharp and racy idiom of his speech had never lost its native tang, or, as the ignorant were

wont to put it, its good old "Yankee twang" (hence his nickname) and he further embellished conversation with such strange and original expressions as "Dorg lion" for male lion, and "Cow lion" for a lioness, wagging vivaciously in a chewing-gum movement, his shrewd eyes, colourless as water, roving the veld with the keen vision of one who for thirty years had had to protect himself from the treacherous things skulking there. His glance went over the head, to the left, and to the right of Felicia, but never directly at her: he was much too shy. Nevertheless (as Randal afterwards told her) she would figure in his diary, down to the slightest details of her dress, features, and speech. His friends declared that Yank's diary "had Pepys' licked to a standstill," and it was his custom to read extracts therefrom to a chosen few. But unless they concealed their ribald glee, they were never so honoured again, for to him his diary was no matter for vapid laughter, but a chronicle of serious and valuable observations. To Felicia's regret no occasion arose for the display of his particular talent in connection with flies. At that early hour the flies were still asleep. A pity!

After breakfast and a little stroll, Felicia made her projected change to the front seat, and gave the Doctor a rest by taking the wheel. Driving a car was not one of Yank's accomplishments. For the first time since Felicia had met Randal, he talked freely of the man he was on his way to visit. She had been careful to avoid the topic for fear he should ask her frankly if she liked Fenn. But perhaps she underrated the Doctor's sense of discretion. His observations upon the subject now, had a casual and unpremeditated air, but they were extraordinarily complete, and by the end of the morning she was acquainted with many salient facts in the life of Fenn, of which she would possibly never otherwise have heard. Randal's information was full of a warm sympathy and admiration such as one man seldom gives another; and he had a good listener. For although a

man may, in your opinion, be dishonourable in so far as his private or secret actions are concerned, that does not *really* prevent you from taking an intelligent interest in his war-exploits, and the vicissitudes of his career. This is what Felicia told herself, anyhow, as an excuse for listening so eagerly, tho' too proud, except once, to display curiosity by asking questions.

Fortunately Randal was capable of chanting his friend's saga without prompting or accompaniment. His particular grief was the "bad deal" that had been Fenn's in the way of war rewards.

"He practically won the V.C. four times during the war. But someone else always got it. I don't say that deliberate injustice was at work, but things pan out like that when a man is modest, and with no powerful forces at his back to see that he gets what he has earned. There are always others, just behind, waiting to seize what he is fool enough to miss, deserving fellows too, for as you know the Navy never runs short on heroes, but the door to rewards always was, and always will be labelled 'PUSH.'

"His name was in the 'Gazette' often enough. 'Conspicuous gallantry'; 'consummate coolness'; 'prompt and distinguished action' and all the rest of it. But the memory of such words does not long survive when a man is placed on the retired list. Pretty thick that! A Rear-Admiral, retired at *thirty-four* with the rank of Captain and pension of Commander! What do you think of your country? No use for a man who has given it the best years of his life! Naturally lots of men *had* to be 'axed' at the end of the war, the service was overcrowded. But *he,* a tried out, pukka, sailor-man from his boyhood up, ought never to have been one of them. However, the Mandarins at the Admiralty do these funny little things sometimes. *There is such a thing as getting to the top before your time;* also being *too young to be promoted further!* A question arising out of *that* is, what

would become of all the pot-bellied shirty old Admirals of glorious pedigree if 'the young, the beautiful, the brave' should be allowed to flower over their heads?

"Then, of course, a man of no family hasn't a dog's chance. There are 'stinkers' in the Navy as well as everywhere else, and there are ways of making a fellow who doesn't know his own parents feel his position, however, imperturbable his outside may be—and you can bet Fenn's outside was imperturbable. But such things corrode the heart."

"Is that actually the case, though?" the girl asked in a low voice, keeping her eyes, which were full of pain, carefully averted, "Doesn't he *really* know who his father and mother are?"

"Hasn't the foggiest," the Doctor's answer was purposely flippant: he did not really feel lightly on the subject. "No trace has ever been found of his relatives. His earliest remembrance is of an old Irish woman news-vendor who dragged him up for several years in London, and whose scallywag sea-roving son, brought him to her from some English sea-port with the story that he was a ship-wrecked child. The son died of D.T.'s before she could get any more out of him, and she didn't try very hard, being anxious to keep the child. She had him baptised at St. Patrick's, Soho, adding her own name to that of her country's patron saint, and he got the foundation of an education at a Catholic day school. He says he was happy enough, until the old woman went west, after which he ran loose in the streets of London, until some busy-body got him into a Home, from which he soon hooked it to sea and began his career as 'ship boy' in a Merchantman. Had the luck to tumble on a skipper, who recognising a good type when he met it, interested himself in getting the boy into the Navy. There, as you have heard, he worked himself up from the bottom rung to one too dangerously near the top to be pleasing to the Mandarins. And you can jolly well guess what a 'milling' he went through to get there. Imagine! a youngster without any education,

except what he had reaped from the sea-ports of the world and ripped out of books! Great boy for books, old Pat. He says Catholics helped him, too, wherever he met them in the world! Clannish lot, Catholics! Talk about clannishness among Jews and Scots! They're not in it with the Holy Romans! Still, he went through the mill all right. No man living knows more about eating the bitter bread of humiliation than he does . . . and it's burnt him to the bone. For, far from being humble, he is one of the proudest men I know. That unknown birth of his sticks in his gizzard, and torments him night and day. What with that, and the hell he has gone through making his career I wonder he has kept as sweet and sane as he has."

"I wonder, too. Not many would have come through." Felicia knew what she was talking about, for in all parts of the world she had met Down-and-outers with the "makings" of great men in them, but the "makings" had been vain! In the end they remained Down-and-outers! It seemed that Patrick Fenn was made of sterner stuff.

"Rather surprising," she presently remarked, carefully examining the horizon, "that he did not marry. A woman might have made up to him, a little, for what he had suffered."

"If she'd been the right one," assented Randal grudgingly, "but it was the wrong one, needless to say who turned up, . . . always *is* in such cases!"

The scenery continued to interest the girl by his side.

"Was it?" she asked with marked detachment.

"He never told me . . . not being the 'telling' sort . . . but I heard it from a fellow who was with him at the Convalescent Home—one of those society affairs for officers. It was after he had been bashed about at Zeebrugge, and she was there, playing at nursing. I never heard what it was he found out . . . but he 'crashed' badly, I understand."

"D'you see that outspan, over there?" Yank's voice broke in on them, his hand pointing to a flat treeless spot about 20

yards off the road. "A Dutchman lost his head there one night. Sleeping under his wagon with the bucksail pegged down all round for safety, he got too hot and poked his head out for air. In the morning they found him with it nipped off clean as a ninepin, and spoor marks showing that a derned lion had been pacing round and round, for a long time, looking for a bit." Mr. Breddon with a deep sigh, as if of sympathy for the lion in getting such a small bit, sank back into reverie, and Randal returned to his subject.

"He ought to go in for political life of course, they need men like him, here, at the fountain head. Even if he got his education out of books that isn't all he knows. In the process of navigating the seven seas a sailor, if he has the seeing eye, gets a squint into more volumes of life than were ever printed. And, you might not believe it, but Pat Fenn has brains behind that hard blue eye of his."

"I have always suspected it," said Felicia, tho' she had never really thought of the eyes in question, as particularly hard: steady, yes; seeking, hungry, angry, sometimes bitter, even brazen: but hard? Yet, on meeting their gaze in the Dorp, that afternoon, she realized the truth of it. He was waiting there for them in the company of Dick Cardross, who had of course been notified by wire of their prospective arrival. But from the presence of the erstwhile Tagati partner she deducted no compliment to herself, for naturally he had come to meet his friend Randal. Even at that she considered he wore an unnecessarily serious air for so bright an occasion. As for the face of Dick it looked as grave as a magenta face with blood-shot eyes could be capable of appearing, Fenn's eyes staring at her over the head of Randal were like blue agate and his words were brittle.

"You may still be in time, if you get a move on." It was to her he dared to speak thus! Criticise the fact of her not having arrived sooner! Taking sides with Cousin Letty! . . . This was Catholic-standing-together with a vengeance! But what impertinence! She returned his gaze arrogantly.

Then suddenly her indignation collapsed, as the inner meaning of the words reached her brain.

"But . . . how awful!" she turned to Dick, soul-stricken and guilty that in the interest of journey and arrival she had almost lost sight of its object. With the sun so gay, the air rushing by so sweetly, her companions lighthearted and cheerful, it had been almost impossible to think of anyone really *sinking* and the word had completely lost its menace, so that the stark threat in Fenn's greeting came upon her with overwhelming force. She could not be induced to wait for even a cup of tea. Fortunately it was not long since Breddon had provided one of his lightning meals! They bade farewell to the lean Yank, and set off at once, and it was then that the real meaning of Fenn's presence became apparent: he had driven the car from Manana, and intended driving it back.

"My nerves ain't too good," Dick admitted shamefacedly, but at something of reproach in the girl's eyes, hastened to add, "Not ponjola *only*. I've been badly rattled over the old lady getting ill like this—and in my house! Feel somehow as if I've done an awful winger on her." She saw then that he was all to bits, and needed bracing up with something other than ponjola.

"But that is all nonsense, Dick! Get it out of your head at once, and don't arrogate the acts of God to yourself, my dear!" They were at the back of the car, with Fenn and Randal in front—the doctor having come along, almost automatically, on hearing of the desperate condition of things. "All the same I can't understand it. It seems so sudden. What do the doctors think is the matter with her?"

"They don't seem to know. It's got 'em licked. She's just fading out of sight, and that's all they can say about it."

"Who have you got?"

"The local man, Somerset, has been shooting backwards and forwards twice a day, doing his damnedest, but he did

his best four days ago, and asked me to wire for Considine from Buluwayo. It's got Considine licked, too."

"Why didn't you wire me sooner?"

"She didn't want you worried, at first, but when Considine said he considered she was booked, we wired you to come at once . . . that's the wire we couldn't understand your not answering, but of course I expected you'd turn up any moment, and when you didn't, I must say, she got a bit crabby, poor old lass."

"But I never received that wire, Dick. There has been miserable carelessness somewhere. *Of course* I would have come at once!"

"Queer you never got it!" he looked non-plussed.

"Very queer," she echoed warmly. "And I shall see that whoever is responsible is made to feel queer, too!" She couldn't help somehow connecting it with Castleton. He had been acting as Secretary and Aide in the last week, and well, perhaps she was doing him an injustice . . . but she feared he might be none too scrupulous where his own interests were concerned.

"Stella's been a brick, and done everything mortally possible. As for old Pagg, she hasn't rested day or night. I take back anything I ever said in scofference of that ancient Abigail."

"Oh . . . if she *could* care for anyone it is Cousin Letty all right," Felicia admitted rather grudgingly. Though willing to concede to Pagg a strong sense of duty she found it hard to recognise any trace of nobility in one so sour, greedy and genteel. Her mind reverted to the sick woman. "But how has she been in herself, Dick? Does she know how serious it is . . . and does she mind?"

"At first she was pretty awful. Lay barking and biting at whoever ventured near . . . especially old Pagg. But when Father Drago came over day after day, I think she began to tumble to it, and now she's cool as a cucumber about dying. He is with her constantly, and there's no doubt it's thanks

to him she takes it all so calmly. Wonderful stand-by, that religion of theirs seems to be to them!"

"Yes, indeed . . . I sometimes wish I were a Catholic!"

"Good Lord!" was all Dick permitted himself to say, not in tolerance, but astonishment that anyone should *wish* about religion at all, especially to belong to one that apparently made you attend, very assiduously, to your P's and Q's. *His* God was a simple Good Fellow who didn't require all that praying and fussing and ritual stuff, only that a man should be straight and clean in his dealings . . . "decent" in every relation of life—and would not be too hard on a poor devil, who used overmuch ponjola as an anodyne for things that hurt too deeply.

They came presently upon Manana, lying bathed in the glory of sunset, and looking as lovely as such scattered, unkempt, mishandled veld homes manage to look without the slightest encouragement, bar an occasional decent wet season. As rain that year had been specially plentiful, the trees were every shade of green, the garden flaunted colour and almost steamed fragrance.

It did not take Felicia long to descend from the car, and speed across the grounds towards the Countess's hut, and the natives watching, saluting her, passed the news among themselves that "*Mvazulu* has returned to see *Figa isolo* die!" The word *Mvazulu* echoed softly in garden, in kitchen, and far down the lands, each boy as he uttered it, making a movement with the right hand held out flat, palm down: a slight wavey movement, as of flowing water.

Mvazulu she who walks like a river flowing after the rain! It was their tribute to Felicia, embodied in a nickname that would go down to posterity. Long since, in gastronomic conference over cook-pots, beside camp-fires, and in far-off kraals, it had been decided that that free flowing gait of hers resembled the movement of a river after rain . . . not the tremendous downfall that turns a river into a blustering bullying flood, but a "good" rain that makes it walk in beauty!

iZulu is the general term for rain and *Umfula emva isulu* signifies "the river after the rain," but that would indeed be "saying a mouthful," a thing from which the native mind is much averse, so the term had been whittled down, until at last, with just that little wavy motion of the hand and a single word, it implied all they meant. *Mvazulu!* By that title Felicia Lissell would be known to native-Rhodesia for ever!

The Countess's descriptive tag was less flattering. Literally *Figa isolo* stands for "one who came yesterday," colloquially it may be translated into "the old back number." Reverence for age, or for anything else, is not a salient native characteristic!

As Felicia reached the hut Stella emerged, and at sight of the girl put out an impulsive hand.

"Shonnie! Thank goodness you've come . . . *at last!*" There was a shade of reproach in the last two words, but this was no moment for the culprit to go, once more, into the matter of a lost telegram.

"How is she?"

"Sleeping a little now . . . and the Doctors think there's just a shade of improvement, but I'm afraid . . ." She shook her head, and its almost unkempt primrose curls tumbled about eyes jaded with fatigue. Felicia had never before seen her looking so careless, so *mal-soignée,* and felt touched, knowing how much "appearances" meant to her.

"I'm afraid you've had a heavy time of it, Stella, I could curse myself for being away!" The other made a little deprecatory gesture, full of weariness, and beckoning her to the hut door, murmured:

"Just as well to see her while she's still asleep!" And Felicia, when she had entered, understood the meaning of this cryptic phrase. Just as well the Countess should not be awake to witness the shock likely to be produced on one who had last seen her in comparative health! For now, wasted to a wraith, she lay less like a woman than a wisp of greenish

smoke, across the massed pillows. Her closed eyes were sunk far back into two caves of purple darkness, the lower part of her shrunken face had taken on the tragic expression of a starving child. It seemed incredible for so great a change to have taken place in so short a time. But for the evidence of her eyes, Felicia would never have believed that the old fighting Tartar could have been reduced to that slender helpless waxen image, faintly tinted with green! It was too pathetic. The girl, pale and shaken, stood gazing in consternation until her eyes filled and she could see no more. A touch on the hand recalled her, from Pagg,—brooding in the background as usual, watchful and subservient but with a lively detestation of the businesslike nurse in heliotrope linen who, for the time being, had usurped her office.

"Better go and get your things off before she wakes up, Miss Shonnie." Outside, Stella supplemented this advice with brief practicability.

"To find you there without your hat, looking as though you've never been away, will be less of a shock to her. It's the weakness of her heart we have to fight now . . . husbanding every beat."

At the call of sickness, under the hovering menace of Death, how simple and womanly Stella had become! Felicia looking at her with warm eyes, felt ashamed of every unkind thought she had ever harboured against her.

Over at the house the two doctors in attendance were holding an *indaba* with Randal, whom, at Dick's urgent request they had willingly taken into consultation. It was a case with them of any port in the storm that threatened to sink their patient's frail barque beyond rescue, and having done, as Dick phrased it, their damnedest, to little avail, they were only too thankful to welcome the naval medico and such suggestions as he might have to offer. For still the real cause of the Countess's illness eluded them.

Fenn had disappeared, but in the cool of the stoep, Father

Drago thoughtfully waited upon events. He so seldom smoked that the cigarette between his lips accentuated rather than diminished his gravity of mien. Felicia joined him and they sat talking awhile in subdued voices. He told her he had not much hope, for though the old lady had a wonderful constitution, days of severe and continuous vomiting had strained the heart and exhausted her general system almost beyond repair.

"And as she still can't keep anything down, there's no way of getting her strength back. However," the priest added simply, "nothing is impossible with God."

Then Pagg entered with news that the Countess was stirring, and that if the girl wanted to be there when she opened her eyes, it was better to come at once. The Doctors allotted her a few minutes before they proceeded to a joint examination, and she had scarcely reached the bedside before the tired lids lifted and she found those famous forget-me-not eyes fixed on her in a surprisingly alert glance.

"Oh? . . . *Shonnie!*" The girl, truly thankful not to hear the added reproach *"At last!"* took her hand and kissed it, whispering gently:

"Dear Cousin Letty . . . I am so sorry . . . I would have been here long ago if I had known."

"Ah! You didn't know? . . . I thought as much!" There seemed to be something significant in her utterance of the words. She closed her eyes again immediately, however, and lay still, but her brows knitted themselves into an expression of intense thoughtfulness, and the hand that had taken hold of Felicia's retained it in a firm clutch. They stayed like that, the old woman, apparently, deeply meditating, the girl afraid to speak or stir; till at last came the sound of approaching footsteps and the doctors entered. The nurse rose to meet them, and Felicia strove gently to disengage her hand, so that she might go, but the sick woman held on tight, and suddenly, when all were gathered round her bed, opening wide eyes full of dominating intelligence,

she addressed them in a weak, but calm and practical voice.

"I wish my body to be taken back to England . . . not left to be chewed by white ants in this disgusting veld—'blasted heath,' that man William Plomer[1] calls it in his book, and he's perfectly right!" She paused for breath—"I'd like to have lain beside Paul in Russia, but that's impossible,"—another pause before adding, with something of her usual spirit, "blasted bolsheviks, there!" The ghost of the old malicious smile hovered for a moment about her lips and was gone. "The vault at home will have to serve . . . Shonnie! You and Pagg are to take me back . . . Is that understood?"

Felicia squeezed her hand assentingly, and from the shadows a harsh voice ejaculated firmly, "Yes, melady!"

"There's one more thing—you doctors please take note that I am absolutely in my right mind and mean what I say—I want an autopsy held on my body. The cause of my death should be cleared up." Once more breath failed her, and by the pause to recapture it, her last words seemed to gain in dramatic intensity: "Damme! I've no business to be dying yet."

The clutch on Felicia's hand loosened, and the girl was gently edged away. As she went out she heard Dr. Somerset rallying the patient cheerily about not being dead yet, by a long chalk. Nevertheless, the verdict, when they returned to the house about twenty minutes later, was that the heart, being at its very lowest, she was unlikely to last the night out. But they remained puzzled, and were openly frank about not being able to put a name to the disease that had her in its fatal grip. Apart from that, it was clear that she was a remarkably strong old woman, with a body in excellent trim, no blood pressure and no organic trouble.

"She will die, of course," said the great Considine, gloomily. "But as far as I can see she *ought* to have been good for another twenty years."

[1] *I speak of Africa,* by William Plomer.

Somerset agreed, adding vexedly that he could make neither head nor tail of it. Randal likewise admitted being unable to "get the hang of it, anyhow." It had them, as Dick picturesquely stated, completely licked. Felicia had never imagined such frank and free avowals of ignorance falling from the lips of medical men. These Rhodesian fellows appeared to be totally unafflicted by those dignified reserves of genius, and powerful withheld sapience, that seem to be the special properties of doctors in civilized centres! She liked them the better for it. They were human, anyway, almost boyish in their naïve annoyance at not being able to "give it a name." For Randal's benefit the case was discussed from its first incidence, everyone contributing such scraps of information as were theirs to give towards a hoped-for elucidation of the original cause. Thus Felicia heard at last the full history of the illness.

Fenn reminded them that the Countess had begun to be unwell as long ago as the Sunday morning of Miss Lissell's departure, for when he arrived and found her having tea in the stoep with Stella, she admitted to feeling so very odd, "with her head extremely light, and the rest of her body extremely heavy," that he hesitated about taking her to the Mission. However, she had insisted on going, and had stood the journey well enough, though when they got there, she looked faintish and they gave her a nip of whisky. After Mass, as she wasn't any better, Father Drago made her go to bed in the guest hut. Fenn had gone back and fetched Pagg, who had stayed with her all night.

Father Drago then took up the tale: In the morning she seemed much better, ate quite a good breakfast, and felt well enough to inspect the Mission School. The Cardrosses came over to lunch, and to drive her back, but she decided to stay another night, did a lot of writing during the afternoon, returning to Manana next day.

On arrival (said Stella) Pagg put her to bed, and as she looked very exhausted the doctor was sent for. He ordered

"bed and slops" for a few days. She could not, in fact, look at food, and they kept her on milk, an occasional glass of champagne, soup specially prepared by Pagg, and sometimes a few grapes. But she presently began running a temperature, showing inability to keep down even this light nourishment, and, from then on, gradually lost strength.

"Did she ever," Considine wanted to know, "make a meal off mushrooms or anything unusual in the vegetable line?"

No. Neither Stella nor Dick could remember anything of the sort.

"Some of that swine Marli's concoctions more likely," proffered the Master of Manana. Marli, it seemed, was the latest thing in cooks. Jim had gone—banished, like Malash, into exile, and Dick evidently did not approve of his successor. But Stella corrected her husband quietly.

"How could it be one of Marli's concoctions, Dick—when she never ate anything but the soups Pagg made for her? As to mushrooms, Doctor, though there are plenty during the rains, we don't gather them for eating, because of the many poisonous fungi there are about."

"That's just it," said Considine. "In this country there are all sorts of unclassified poisons to be found about us—both in the vegetable and insect line."

A memory roused by this remark suddenly made Felicia Lissell feel sick at the pit of her stomach. The word *isiBunu* leapt into her mind, and—she could not help it!—her glance leapt to Stella. But that weary-eyed woman was saying earnestly to Considine:

"Are there *really?* What a good thing the natives don't know or they'd be poisoning us whenever we offended them!"

"Oh, they know all right," Considine smiled derisively. "Precious little, in the 'nature' line, hidden from them! Still, they're a harmless lot, generally speaking, and scarcely capable of any Borgia business."

"I should think not!" broke in Father Drago spiritedly. "Premeditated crime is *most* rare with our natives. A good fight among themselves, yes, a bash on the head in hot blood—but they are decent creatures, really, most good-hearted . . ." The others were smiling at him.

"We know all about *that!*" they chipped him gently.

"You and your little black brother!"

"A born Negrophile; that's what you are, Father!"

Considine, having partaken of a sun-downer, was on the move. Clearly there could be nothing more for him to do, here, and he had to get back to Buluwayo. Somerset, in case of need, now had Randal at hand, and the latter was asked to stay for a day or two. On his assenting, Somerset decided to leave for the Dorp, returning first thing in the morning. Father Drago would naturally remain throughout the night. Felicia stated her intention of relieving the nurse, and being told by Stella that the latter had come on duty at 5 P. M., expressly for night duty, said she should nevertheless stay up, in case of being wanted.

After dinner, a not too cheerful meal, Stella was unanimously advised that the one and only place for her was bed. She looked absolutely dropping with fatigue, but did not want to give in; said it seemed so mean of her to go off and sleep while everyone else watched, and poor Cousin Letty was in extremis. But the Doctor told her not to be foolish, and Dick looked gratefully at Felicia for contending that Stella, having already undergone more than her fair share of anxiety and nursing, was due to take some rest, unless she wanted to face a breakdown herself. So at last she let herself be persuaded, though only under promise of being called if the Countess took a critical turn. The Doctor's answer to this was that, after another look at her and a new injection, he still had hopes of a change for the better before morning.

He, Dick and Fenn started their vigil in the back verandah, where they could talk quietly without fear of disturb-

ing anyone, but the priest and Felicia, detaching themselves from the others, decided, for coolness' sake, it was a terribly hot night, to occupy two deck chairs out in the open, within reach, though, not within hearing of the Countess's door. By eleven o'clock the farm lay wrapped in a stillness broken only by the chirp and call of night things. Even the boys over in their compound, conscious of grave eventualities, had subdued their usual jabberings to a mere murmur of sound that rose and fell not unpleasingly upon the clear air. The same snow-white moon, that had lit Felicia's journey down, was again mounting to her office of flooding the land with an unearthly radiance, and, there being no wind at all, the full tide of summer heat seemed to mingle with the moonlight, and crush down on the earth with dazzling bright oppressiveness.

From time to time Randal came over, and they would go softly indoors and watch awhile by the bedside, and on one of these occasions the old lady spoke to Felicia on the subject of her Memoirs, giving instructions that she was to collect all papers connected with the subject and hand them over to a literary executor, for future publication. Almost immediately she fell back into sleep again, and though breathing labouredly seemed peaceful enough, and the Doctor, commenting on the unwisdom of using up her supply of fresh air, they presently returned to waiting at their outposts.

In the garden the trees fascinated Felicia. She could not keep her glance from wandering among them. Once the priest, looking at her curiously, asked what she saw out there: but she scarcely answered. They were so silent, yet so alive, those trees! Shadows, black as ink, lay beneath them, while high above, their tops were touched with silver. A line of jacarandas spread their delicate foliage in a fern-like filagree against the sky. Not a leaf nor a petal stirred. Suddenly across the veld came a muffled *thrum . . . thrum . . . thrum* a sombre significant sound, thrilling in its very

monotony. Sehla was softly thudding upon his "smelling out" drum! Some lines written by a poetess of India came to the girl's mind.

Dost thou hear the tom-toms throbbing? . . .
Like a lonely lover sobbing . . .
. . . . . .
Plaintive sounds, restrained, enthralling,
Seeking through the twilight falling,
Something lost beyond recalling, in the darkness of the night.

The priest made a sound that might have been exasperation, but Felicia sat very still, as if hypnotized, frozen in spite of the heat, by dread and foreboding. She was wondering how long the Grey Shadow had been out there, among the trees . . . seeking something . . . waiting!

And presently she knew somehow that she had really been aware of It for some time. She had seen It, as usual, "with the back of her eyes," half-loitering, half-hovering in that elusive way It had. That was why the trees had fascinated her so much! It had been there eluding her, all the time, slipping back and forth, moving always to where her glance could not catch it up. Waiting, among the shadows of which It was part! Now she knew that the Countess was to die, for the *iDhlozi* had come for her! It had been Letitia Karamine's *iDhlozi* that had waited on that very first day at Manana! The girl gave a long sigh, and, without realizing it, spoke the words aloud:

"In all that crowded room I never thought of Cousin Letty!"

"What did you say?" asked Father Drago startled. And that was how it came about, that for the first time since she was a little child, she spoke to another about the Shadow. Sitting there in the blinding moonlight, surrounded by a world of fantastic shadows, of which, unseen by other eyes than hers, that Grey Spectre was one, she whispered to the priest the strange story of her haunting. And he, grave-

faced, shrewdly watching and listening, never for a moment doubted. There was that in her eyes which could not be doubted. She did not know it, but at times of seeing the Shadow her own face changed, becoming not quite of this world. And as it happened, the priest had been looking at her on that day of her arrival, at the moment she recognised the presence of the *iDhlozi;* and he had at once become aware of an experience, not quite normal, going on under his eyes. From the first, too, he had recognised Felicia to be "out of the common run." Higher and more unusual things lived behind that beautiful, unusual face, than were common to the ordinary girl of her time and place; so that what she told him did not come entirely as a surprise, though he was immensely troubled by it. Reason told him that this extra-sense possessed by her of "visioning" things not meant to be seen by mortal eye must in time make for unhappiness, might even shift the delicate balance of her mind. And spiritual wisdom taught him that such a "gift" was more likely to be of pagan than of Divine origin—a gift somehow, of Africa, that land teeming with sinister things, seeming always to him, much as he loved it, to be the special Principality of those Dark Powers from whom every Catholic prays daily to be delivered.

Yes. The girl whispering at his side, unloading her heart at last of the burden that had long wearied and filled her with dread, acknowledged it to be *in Africa,* as a little child, that she had first known this Thing. Its very name was African . . . native of the natives! *iDhlozi:* "a Shade from the underworld!" It had been a saying of Old Lobengula, the old King of the Matabele, that good *amadhlozi* remain in and around the towns and people, while bad *amadhlozi* (aba-Tagati) dwell in the veld. Absurd perhaps to take into account the occultism of that old heathen, yet here was Felicia telling that it was only in the wilds—the lonely places of the veld—that she had suffered the vision. Almost undoubtedly, then, it *was* something Africa had be-

stowed on her—one of the Dark Continent's undesirable gifts! Here she had got it, here developed it, here it still pursued her! And here, meditated the priest, it ought to be fought, overcome and got rid of out of her life. But how to effect that desirable issue, how even to begin on it, was not so simple a matter. For rightly he read that Felicia had no *real* spiritual weapons or armour. A good girl, yes, because well brought up—high-minded, pure, honourable, and professing the usual English belief in a God, Who did not, however, enter very much into her life. No doubt He was that English God, of whom George Moore said (or was it George Bernard Shaw?) that He probably represents Himself to them as an Englishman 12 feet high! Even *that* God, however, as the priest happened to know, Felicia had not taken the trouble to visit in the recognised House of Worship at the Dorp; though doubtless she had gone in Salisbury, where the singing of the National Anthem upon the entry of the Governor naturally made it incumbent on said Governor and party to be present every Sunday morning!

He wondered if she ever prayed for protection against this Thing, or said *any* prayers at all? Whether she had ever read in her Bible the words: "and deliver my darling from the Power of the Dog!" He, himself, tough old citizen of the world as he was, would never have dreamed of lying down at night before throwing up a prayer for defence from evil spirits and without a sprinkle of holy water, last thing, to keep them away. However, he was a born Catholic, and that was another thing indeed.

"It's hard to know where to begin on these Prots," he thought to himself, half-sadly, half-humorously.

He did begin, though, and through the long time of waiting, quietly and sanely unfolded to her his convictions on the subject, counselling her that her best means of ridding herself of the Thing that haunted her was the development of spiritual faith, a belief in God, and by prayer. Above all,

by prayer. She listened earnestly, promising nothing, but evidently profoundly moved by what he said. Sometimes they were interrupted by Randal, and their visits to the patient, and once the latter, evincing a sudden liveliness, asked clearly for "Shonnie and Dick," though when they came, she only smiled with unwonted softness, murmured something about its being "all right soon," and moved one of her frail hands in a gesture of dismissal. But Father Drago, she kept by her—there were things that only he could do, and say, for her! Somehow, they knew then that the hour of passing was close at hand, and they did not go far, but lingered waiting, beside the door. A little later they were called again, between two and three, that still small hour which so many souls choose for the quitting of this human tent we call the body. Father Drago had on his stole, SOMETHING shining in a small Pyx, stood on a white cloth between lighted candles, and there was an expression of achieved peace upon the dying face, which yet looked more alive, and younger than Felicia had ever seen it. The blue eyes were alight with a strange radiance, the skin gleamed with a transparent fairness that threw up the fine clear-cut beauty of her features. The lips, erstwhile so arrogant, were curving themselves gently now to the exquisite cadences of the Anima Christi!

Passio Christi . . . conforta me!

came clear and confident.

Intra Tua vulnera . . . absconde me.
Ab hoste maligno . . . defende me.
In hora mortis meae . . . voca me!

Felicia, with Dick beside her, on their knees now in the presence of Death, had no difficulty in translating the liquid Latin words:

Within Thy wounds . . . hide me,
From the malignant host . . . defend me.
In the hour of my death . . . call me!

The old voice gathered itself up for the last urgent petition:

Et jube me . . . venire ad Te!

then faltered and faded into silence. It seemed as though Something winged and wonderful entered with a rush of wind, abiding graciously, for a fleeting moment, in the hut. Afterwards, a great stillness fell, broken only by the sound of Pagg sobbing in the shadows.

. . . . . .

In the days that followed Father Drago blessed and consecrated, at the far end of the garden, a lovely spot under a great clump of wild trees that because of its picturesqueness had not been destroyed. There, in her leaden casket, they laid all that was mortal of Letitia Karamine, until such time as arrangements for transport to England could be made. No very quick matter, for not all ships will accept human cargo in such form, and several weeks, it was computed, must elapse before the numerous official red-taped documents were sufficiently in order to enable Felicia and Pagg to start via the East coast, upon their dolorous mission. For though, left to herself, Felicia might not so literally have interpreted the dying woman's wish, Pagg sternly declared that the injunction laid upon them by her mistress, that they were to actually *accompany* her back to England was as clear and precise as the promise they had given. So, for once, Felicia allowed herself to be overruled by the old maid-servant. Indeed her state of mind was such that almost anyone, at that time, might have overruled her, as far as the late Countess was concerned. Not only was she suffering from an obsession that she had badly neglected and undervalued that august relative, but she could not get it out of

her head that by going away to Salisbury she had been guilty of abandoning the old lady to a malign fate that would not otherwise have overtaken her. Added to which self-inflicted torment she had contracted a severe chill, ran for some days a "spiky" temperature, and, as she languidly told Randal, felt like a violin with all its strings cut. He thought the simile a good one, considering the strung-up, emotional period just passed through, but contented himself with telling her that she was probably entertaining a flu' germ given off by Ropner the Aide before he betook himself to bed.

"That accounts for it, then," said the patient dully, full of the tenderest self-pity and a longing to go into the wilderness and cry herself to death. Flu' always made her feel like that, especially in the recovery stage. The last two years are the worst, as the saying is. In her heart she suspected, as did the doctor, that the fell complaint mentioned did not compose the real foundation of her wretchedness, but she was not going to admit to him, or herself, the full gamut of her emotional experiences. The *iDhlozi's* reappearance had evoked in her for the first time real terror; she had been deeply affected by the spiritual counsellings of Father Drago; and finally, the beauty and simplicity of Letitia Karamine's passing had left her a memory that would abide for ever: but there were other thoughts and fears stirring beneath the surfaces of her mind, that she shrank from facing and analysing, though she knew they were there, even as one may be aware of live things darting under deep water, without wanting to fish for them.

Everything considered, she was not sorry that by medical edict bed had been her portion immediately after the Countess's funeral. Stella, too, in order to avoid a threatened nervous breakdown, was condemned to a like seclusion, and for a time Pagg, assisted by Nurse Twilley of the heliotrope uniform, completely ruled the roost. It was from the nurse that Felicia heard of the carrying out of that other strange wish of the dead woman. The doctors, before the burial,

had held an autopsy, and taken away certain portions of the body for analysis, but as nothing further was heard of the matter, the results had evidently been negative, and it seemed probable that the mystery of the Countess's death would remain a mystery to the end.

When the invalids *did* at last emerge into everyday life, Felicia being the first to do so, it was already mid-December, with Christmas, the hottest time of the year close upon them. Not exactly weather in which to set about preparing for a long railway journey and voyage . . . even thinking of anything of the sort was a *supplice* in that simmering breathlessness! From nine A. M. until the sun fell below the horizon, the most satisfying occupation was to lounge on the shady stoep, deep in a deck chair, feet perched on a footrest, and a lemon drink at hand, and under such conditions it seemed just possible, languidly, to discuss plans for a move at some future date unnamed.

Both Stella and Dick were urgent that Felicia should think of plans not at all, but entreated her instead to stay as long as possible with them. From the Maddoxes, too, came a pressing invitation that she should return to them until she left the country: but this suggestion found no responsive echo in her breast. She felt she must stay, to the end, at Manana, which, terribly as it had betrayed the Countess's trust, still possessed its weird enchantment. Meanwhile, there was much to do during such cool hours as the sun's absence permitted, in the correspondence line. The sorting and putting together of the Countess's manuscripts formed alone a Herculean task, and there was also an unceasing stream of written and cabled sympathy to be dealt with, not only from all over the country, but every part of the world. The English papers were full of biographical sketches of the deceased lady, and these in turn being cabled abroad, it was astonishing what echoes they roused from the four corners of the earth. Not only that, but Rhodesia suddenly awoke to the fact that a celebrated personage had

been hiding in its midst . . . and still sojourned temporarily in the veld's breast! Upon which realization visitors as well as letters and telegrams began to arrive . . . in shoals! Of course *real* friends were one thing, and always grateful and refreshing; even bare acquaintances, when they took the trouble to drive out, had to be met with a certain assumption of cordiality, however untimely their visit. But when it came to complete strangers arriving in drafts on a sort of pilgrimage of curiosity to a grave in a garden . . . and expecting tea, pleasant gossip, and whisky and sodas thrown in, it began to be too much of a good thing! Really not a pleasant side of the Rhodesian character! In fact it could not be called Rhodesian at all. They branded themselves, these pushing, intruding Paul-Prys and Queer people, as anything but the "good old sort" or even the good new sort. They were the Pink-penultimate of gory Cheek, Dick declared, also that they made a man bloody-minded, and he talked darkly of blowing up the Drift to make it impassable for cars, or, alternatively, throwing down half a mile of broken glass and tin-tacks. But such desperate reprisals would only, of course, have ricochetted neatly back upon themselves and the friends they really cared to see. At last they considered flight.

"Let's shut up the place and go away . . . The Falls . . . Beira . . . any old where," they suggested to each other, briskly before dawn or after sunset, but in-between-whiles groaningly and in despair. Money would now soon be no object to the Cardrosses, since Dick was his Aunt's heir, as the solicitors had cabled at once. But to go to either of the places in question entailed a hot and exhausting journey to which neither of the women felt equal. Besides, the Falls, like Beira, would at that time of year be overcrowded with tourists. In fact, if you *did* happen to possess a cool and solitary farm of your own, it was ideal to stick to it during the peculiarly tropical spell of weather that blesses Christmas-tide. Manana was cool enough . . . if only they could

have kept it solitary! As it was, Fenn's suggestion that they should all come over to his place and "make a job of it" by amalgamating the holiday festival with his housewarming, seemed to Felicia, at least, in the nature of a godsend, though a couple of weeks before she could not have imagined herself looking with favour upon such a proposal. Perhaps the presence of Randal and Yank Breddon at Poinsettia Pass made all the difference.

Randal had been taking tea with them at Manana on the morning when the last straw was laid upon their backs in the shape of a visitation from a family they all cordially detested. Dick called them the Meal-worms, because, as he said, they were pallid, probing, persistent, parasitic, and always arrived at meal-times; he furthermore described Colonel Milward as cankersome, his son as a slug, and the rest of the family as a lot of magotty females. This, of course, was sheer intolerance. But his voice, when he peered through the sunblinds and spied their car wobbling up from the Drift, rang with worse things than intolerance: rage, abhorrence, almost hydrophobia came volleying forth.

"My God! If it isn't those blighted Meal-worms again! Twice in ten days! I *ask* you!" And already it was too late to escape the brutes by bolting across to the huts.

"We are caught like rats in a trap!" his groan was of a strong man in agony, while the others giggled with despair in their hearts, except, of course, Randal, who scarcely realized the situation, the raging boredom that threatened, added to the bitterness of having to rummage up lunch for five well-hated people.

Certainly the boys had been warned that upon first sight of this particular gang they were to rush out to the gate before a descent from the car was possible, and firmly announce that the master, mistress and every other living soul at Manana were *out* . . . Gone away . . . Departed thence for some other place . . . Were even, if necessary, dead . . . *anything* rather than let the enemy pass. And to the gratifi-

cation of the anxious watchers in the stoep these instructions were being faithfully interpreted. Drawn up at the gate five household boys stood making large, lying gestures towards the empty veld, and announcing dramatically:

"Inkos u hambili! Inkosikaas u hambili!" Everybody according to their dolorous tale and soulful gazing into blue distance had jolly-well *hambili-ed,* skedaddled, and taken to the bush. But did that stop the Milwards? No. Nothing would stop the Milwards. Coolly, relentlessly, impassive as a squadron of tanks they came on. Panic in the stoep!

"What are we to do?" they cried out upon each other, and Felicia was the only one with an idea.

"Let's go into the sitting-room, lock the doors and lie on the floor out of sight. After all, if no-one appears, they're bound to clear out in a little while."

It was not much of a plan, but no-one seemed to be in a position to offer a better, and they had no time to waste, barely time indeed to scuttle within, lock the doors and compose themselves in a line on the floor, as close under the windows as possible, in case of peeping Toms! In the stark silence that ensued the Milwards entered the stoep. Of course the first objects their eyes fell upon were the remains of morning tea and several, still smoking, cigarette ends, and they drew their perfectly audible conclusions.

"Must actually have gone off when they saw us coming!" snarled the canker.

"The rotters!" hissed the slug.

"Just to get out of giving us a bit of luncheon or even a cup of tea! . . . I've a good mind to order the boys to make some." Mrs. Canker sounded more than vindictive.

"Better not, Kate," the eldest maggot, a bleak sister-in-law warned. "They may be in hiding somewhere."

"I wouldn't put it past them." They were walking about the stoep peering everywhere. Someone tried the door, shaking the handle disgustedly.

"Locked! Did you ever know anything like it!"

Then a window was tried, and to the horror of the prone forms on the floor there followed a sliding sound. No-one had thought of bolting the windows! Two seconds later a head intruded itself through the opening, though what the owner of the head saw no-one on the floor knew, for each pair of eyes remained firmly closed, as if in death, and each body lay stark and silent as a corpse. What else could they do? . . . except burst out laughing, and that would indeed have been foolish, entailing a sheepish rising up, sheepish explanations, and what was worse, sheepish acceptance of the loathsome situation. No, better by far to remain dead. Unfortunately Dick emitted some stertorous sound, caused either by suppressed laughter, or hatred, or just general apoplexy, thus giving the show completely away to the heads popping in one after another, to gaze, and sniff, and withdraw. But still those corpse-like forms stuck valiantly to the floor . . . and by silence defeated the enemy.

"Sleeping beauties!" someone snorted contemptuously, and slammed down the window.

"Sleeping? *Drunk,* you mean," was echoed venomously back in a feminine voice.

"Of course—drunk. And before eleven in the morning!" That was Mrs. Maggot's parting shot, as they filed out of the stoep. When the sounds of a departing car had completely died away the drunkards arose, to drink. They needed it!

CHAPTER VII

CASTLETON too was staying at Poinsettia Pass. That *dégagé* gentleman having "turned up," as usual, finding himself received coldly at Manana by the one person from whom he hoped for a warm welcome, had proceeded at once to ingratiate himself with Fenn. For Felicia had indeed been disconcertingly frank with him on the subject of the undelivered telegram, making no bones over her resolve to have nothing further to say to him until the matter was cleared up. His indignation at being suspected seemed genuine enough, but she was determined to place no real faith in it until such time as she should be proved wrong.

And after all he *was* innocent! A drastic search of the postal archives, for which procedure, in a hurry to clear his character, he promptly got permission from the Most High in Salisbury, revealed the fact that no such telegram had ever passed over the wires or been handed in for despatch! It then transpired that Stella was the person who had driven into the Dorp, for the express purpose of sending off the message, she confessed that, as it was a blazing afternoon, instead of going to the Post Office herself, she had, after writing it out in the lounge of the Hotel, handed it to a native attendant with the money for its dispatch. A further search which Dick insisted on making for this culprit proved singularly unfruitful. For though the whole staff of indoor boys employed at the Hotel was paraded by order before Stella, she was unable to spot her man. In fact she declared herself to be definitely certain of her man not being among those paraded! Upon which the only conclusion to be drawn

was that some outside scoundrel, pretending to be a Hotel porter had destroyed the telegram and decamped with the money. This theory, propounded by Dick, called forth indignant repudiation from the Hotel authorities, who denied both the possibility of a strange boy being in the lounge without detection or daring to take money for an errand under the very nose of the staff. There ensued what Castleton described as "quite a large-sized leaping row," with warm words said on both sides, and a shaking off of the hotel dust from the feet of Manana. But in the end nothing satisfactory emerged from the enquiry—except the complete exculpation of Castleton. Which after all was all *he* cared about.

From the way he now stuck closer than a brother to Fenn, it almost looked as if he were qualifying for the position lately occupied by Paget Vyner. They were never apart, and he it was who accompanied the master of Poinsettia when he motored over with the Christmas-housewarming proposition: indeed, Felicia would not have been surprised to find that the hatching of the idea had taken place in that nimble brain. But what interested her more was the light in Stella's eyes as they rested on Fenn . . . a curious gleam noted once or twice before, and which had come to be associated with trouble for anyone evoking it! Although since Felicia's return they had been all together in company on various occasions, it was the first time she had happened to notice Fenn and Stella actually speaking to each other, and she could not but be struck by the latter's pronounced lack of cordiality. Furthermore it was plain that the proposed excursion would not be with Stella's benison, if undertaken at all. Up till that moment, she it was who had been the most ardent advocate for flight from the farm, but now she suddenly proclaimed that to spend Christmas away from her own home was a thing she had never cared about . . . the weather besides being far too hot to make a move, and she and Shonnie far too crocky!

"But we'll move you without your having to stir an eye-

lash," proclaimed Castleton. "Carry you both over every foot of the ground, if necessary." He gazed feverishly at Felicia who hastily pushed a large cup of tea at him.

"Dick has practically promised for the whole party." Fenn was unwise enough to say this, smiling at Stella in an exasperating fashion, though his eyes looked as if they could not be broken with a hammer. She flushed.

"Then he'd no business to," she said flatly. Dick had in fact met them at the gate, piloted them in, trumpeting their errand, and was at that moment foraging for the inevitable strong drinks, spite of the fact of eleven o'clock tea being set out in grand array. He returned bearing a bottle of whisky, in time to hear Fenn blandly continuing as if Stella's remark had passed un-noted over his head.

"The main crowd won't be coming over till Christmas Eve, . . . next Tuesday . . . but we could get in a quiet week-end before . . . just ourselves, Randal and Breddon."

"Yank Breddon!" sighed Stella contemptuously, "*that* oaf!"

"Oh . . . come!" laughed Castleton. "He's a priceless old sport really, with his 'dawg lions' and 'Bob cats.' "

"I hope he hasn't got his pack of hounds with him," said Dick. "Regular Heinz's they are, 57 varieties in each animal. You get a warm reception from them I can tell you, if you approach Yank's camp while he's away.

> " 'Mongrel, puppy, whelp and hound,
> And cur of low degree,'——

as Goldsmith wrote. It's about the only bit of poetry I know."

"No. He hasn't brought the pack. Fenn wouldn't stand for that."

"Only because they'd corrupt my dogs . . . take 'em off hunting. But of course there are no better animals to go after lion with, than mongrels. Yapping, nipping, and

snarling round the king of beasts they get him absolutely rattled. Yank knows a thing or two."

"Horrid old man! He bores me to passionate yells," breathed Stella, languid as a broken flower. "However, as I don't see how we can possibly go, it doesn't matter." Dick was staring blankly at her.

"Not go to Pat's housewarming!" His eye-balls almost popped out of their sockets, the rest of his face plainly shouting; "Here have we been worrying where to go, and now we've got the chance . . . and with one of our best friends . . . you're being narky! You must be mad, woman!" That was what his expression said, his lips gently and firmly asserted:

"You're dotty, my child. *Of course* we can go . . . unless we fall down dead before it's time to start. *You're* keen, aren't you, Shonnie?"

Keen? Oh, well, she would not go as far as *that*. With Fenn staring sardonically and Nigel making notes to be used in evidence against her, she gave Dick rather an enchanting smile and admitted that it seemed a good way out of the present impossible situation. "After all, we can't get drunk before eleven *every* morning!" she said.

"No indeed!" Dick virtuously agreed, amid the chuckles of the other men, to whom of course Randal had recounted the stirring tale. "Though how the deuce you will manage to put everybody up, Pat? . . ."

"There's plenty of accommodation . . . and I've had half-a-dozen tents sent out as well. We can camp out and leave the house to the ladies."

"Good line . . . what about guns?"

"Oh, guns naturally. There's bags of shooting."

"There *would* be . . ." was Stella's sarcastic comment, "in the middle of the close season!" Fenn continued to smile at her with stony equanimity.

"Plenty of legitimate stuff . . . wild pig, duck, quail, spring hares . . . and as it happens I've got a permit for

a herd of koodoo that's been breaking down my fences and making mince of the young crops . . . to say nothing of the baboons visiting the orchard every night. No need to break the game laws."

"I should shay sho!" cried Dick blithe as a schoolboy, and brandishing Johnnie Walker. "Say when, Pat?"

"Thanks old man . . . I'd sooner have tea."

"Oh, you *must* have a drink . . . everyone must, just to celebrate escape from the meal-worms."

"All right then, but a very young one." He turned to Felicia. "You may even get that leopard you're keen on. My boys report seeing one about."

At which she could not keep the sparkle from her eyes. Tiger, elephant and lion had fallen to her bag in different parts of the world, but never, so far, a leopard; and she yearned for a good skin.

"A Mannlicher for that, I suppose?"

"What calibre is yours?"

"Number seven."

"That's about right. No use trying for a leopard at anything over two hundred yards."

"I'll bet it's the brute that got my calf," pronounced Dick.

"Probably. The boys say it's a rover. There are very few permanent residents of the tribe left hereabouts."

When they went soon afterwards, they took with them Dick's definite promise to see that the party was ready to be fetched next morning, if they came over early before the heat of the day set in; a faintly-smiling, non-committal assent from Felicia; and from Stella an enigmatic silence that might mean anything. Her stormy glances were mostly for Fenn, but it was patent that she took small interest in a man so devoted to another person as Castleton showed himself to be. He was what is known as a one-woman man, and didn't care who knew it. Despicable fool, Stella thought him. After they had gone, her opposition to Fenn's plan came leaping out with no uncertainty.

"Why should we go over to his housewarming?" she asked, looking impatiently from Dick to Felicia. "Personally I've no further use for him. Everyone knows that the split at Tagati was his doing."

"It's the first I've heard of it!" retorted Dick.

"You hear so little!" his wife's voice was acid as well as stubborn. "*I* know it for a fact, and I consider that it looks rottenly disloyal to Padge for us to go tumbling all over Fenn."

Dick tried to be patient with her.

"You've got it all wrong, my dear child. Why should we take sides with one or the other anyhow? They are both our friends, and it won't help to patch things up, if . . ."

"Nothing will patch things up," she retaliated violently, "If you knew as much as I do . . . and how rottenly Pat Fenn has behaved . . ." Here Felicia, evidently not wishing to hear more of the argument, rose and strolled off in the direction of her own hut. Dick, after one thoughtful glance at her back, turned on his wife tersely:

"Doesn't it occur to you that other people come into this too? And that if you know such a devil of a lot you should either keep it to yourself or share it fairly."

He looked at her so narrowly that a faint apprehension flickered across her face.

"How can I share the confidences of my friends?" her tone was more reasonable. "Even," she hesitated, "with you, Dick."

Even with him! He smiled ironically at that, and behind his unhappy eyes thought his own long thoughts. All he said was, quietly enough:

"If they were confidences perhaps it would be more honourable not to refer to them at all."

He stood a moment looking at her, sitting there, her dropped eyes on a cigarette she was twisting between her fingers. At last with a half-sigh he went indoors. She remained very still, thinking tensely and with that preoccupied

gleaming look Felicia had noticed once before that morning, but when her husband came back with his hat, and carrying the stick he always used for going over the lands, she got up and impulsively put out her hands in a pretty charming way.

"I see that I was wrong, Dick. I'll make up for it by going to Poinsettia and being as nice as I can. Will that do?" She smiled at him dazzlingly, and a light came into his bloodshot eyes.

"No one can be nicer than you when you want, Stella."

"Give me a kiss on it then," she said softly, holding up her lips to him. In a moment his arms were round her. But her face went very pale in that hot embrace, her eyes closed, a slight shiver ran through her, she seemed like a woman about to faint and Dick's arms fell away, his own face losing some of its deep colouring. She sat down murmuring half-apologetically:

"I suppose it's the smell of whisky . . . it always makes me feel sick."

"I'm sorry," he muttered huskily, and suddenly grew incoherently violent, "But, by God! if you cared a damn *what* I did . . . cared enough to ask me . . . I'd give it up to-morrow . . . *to-day* if you wanted. . . ."

"Certainly *not,* Dicky!" all her vigour and vivacity came back in a wave at so ridiculous a notion. "I should *hate* a husband who didn't drink anything. You need it, in this rotten country. I'm sure if I were a man I'd drink—like merry hell, I would," she laughed gaily. "Have one now before you go out into the beastly heat . . . It'll cheer you up."

Poor Dick! He looked at the bottle. It was a toss-up whether he pitched it out of the verandah and began a new rule of life straight off . . . or yielded to the demon in him, famishing for a "bracer" after the emotional scene just passed through. Stella laid her palm against the side of the syphon and smiled encouragingly.

"The soda's deliciously cool! . . . a drink will do you good, old boy." Naturally no further inducement was needed by Dick to pour out a stiff five-barred one. That's the way it's done!

"When the money comes, and the debts are all paid up," he was saying a moment later, "You shall have the best car I can get, darling, and we'll go for a second honeymoon somewhere . . . shall we?"

She nodded. But after he had gone off, whistling cheerfully, followed by his dogs, she remained standing, staring after him, her face distorted by what was more a grimace than a smile, twisting its beauty into bitter devastation.

. . . . . .

Poinsettia Pass was at its best. That lushy valley, entered by a Pass between the hills, had a way of remaining green when all the rest of the Midlands was parched, but this year, after the fine rains that had fallen, it blazoned in wildest beauty. A jewel of a place. Out in the open veld the delicate flowers of spring had long since withered, and the grass taken on the sunkissed pallor of midsummer. But in the valley, protected by mountain range on one side and a thick forest on the other, the wild jasmine still flung its wistful fragrance from the bush, and the wisteria tree yet burgeoned, heavy with hanging blue blossom.

A long avenue of flowering gums led from the river which ran along the inside of the Pass, and massed behind the gums were the great flamboyant trees rarely seen out of Natal where they flourish in tropical splendour. It was these flaming trees that had given the Pass the rest of its name, because the original owner of the land had mistaken the great scarlet flowers for poinsettias. Nearer the house the gum trees ceased, the avenue becoming fringed with syringas and jacarandas, all out in a panoply of green plumes and blue tassels. The settler who in early days possessed himself of this fair spot had been content with the planting of trees

rather than the erection of buildings, and the present owner reaped the benefit of such altruism. A clever architect had been able to introduce among the matured boscage, a lovely copy of an old Cape farm, its white walls, tall chimneys, and pillared stoeps looking as if they had been dipped in wine because of the streams of Burgundy-coloured blossom flowing over them from great clumps, big as houses themselves, of bougainvillæa. This freely-growing creeper-tree that adds such life and colour to the gardens of Rhodesia, is beloved of birds, and here, the weaver birds, bright canary-coloured creatures, but "homey" and cheeky as English robins, had hung a perfect colony of grassy nests to dance from the vivid spraying branches. The sheer beauty of the place, with its feathery trees and wine-dipped walls against a line of blue, had taken Felicia by the heart the first time she saw it, and this last homely touch of the friendly confident birds about its very threshold almost finished her off, for she found herself entering the house with tears in her eyes.

It was strange never to have been in it before. But both Fenn and Vyner had had an obsession about no one seeing inside until it was completed, so a large summer-house had been put up in the garden, from whence hospitality could be dispensed to visitors, with a laughing "thus-far-and-no-further" fiat. Felicia had accepted tea there once or twice with the rest of the Manana party, and noted the pains taken to ensure the comfort of feminine visitors, from the cushioned divan to the little curtained-off recess with dressing table, mirror, and powder bowl complete. Now the summer-house stood deserted, and they were admitted at last to the sacred interior precincts! Very beautiful these, too, if rather on the austere side. Big rooms with tall windows, pale walls, and thatched roofs high-pitched and beam-supported. Everything very cool and clean-looking, with plenty of space to move about in. The heavy teak chairs and wide leather-bottomed settles had come from Father Drago's Mission where his boys specialised in the construction of furniture from na-

tive woods; but these were interspersed by some fine old Dutch chests, and pieces of good English oak. The dining room had a magnificent carved refectory table that Fenn had bought, through an expert, from a Brittany castle and had kept stored in the Dorp till it could be given worthy surroundings.

The Manana party had been fetched by Castleton and Fenn as arranged, though not so early as planned, for Stella managed to delay the start by two hours, and Poinsettia was not reached until lunch time. That was all right, for a most delectable cold meal had been prepared, the only thing that *might* have proved a fly in the ointment being that six more people than prescribed had by that time turned up to partake of it. Fortunately none of them belong to the genus Mealworm, but were old friends, including Father Drago, the de Wiltons with the inevitable Biscuit, and Buffalo Bill; also, a stranger whom Fenn had picked up en route—an old prospector legging it to the nearest mine in hope of a job—and insisted on bringing back to lunch. Fortunately too, "Harrods," Fenn's chief-of-staff, was as capable in the all-providing line as his name suggested, and there was enough to go round of iced soup, game-pie, salmi of wild duck, baron of beef, and a very fine Rhodesian ham. Likewise a delicious mousse, Cape peaches, and late strawberries with cream!

"It's easy to see you've pinched the Tagati cook," commented Clarry de Wilton. "No one but Harrods could turn out such a lunch."

"Not pinched, if you don't mind," Fenn protested. "He was my boy long before we had Tagati, and refused to stay when I came away."

"And the rest of the boys naturally followed, I suppose? they usually change *en bloc,*" said Father Drago.

"Something of the sort."

"Rather rough on poor old Padge!" persisted Stella softly, Fenn looked at her steadily.

"As a matter of fact he was so determined to make a clean sweep that he sacked even those boys I did not take."

"I know," chimed in the Biscuit. "He told me before leaving, that he was getting a new staff from a Nyassaland Mission where they are specially trained. Also a marvellous St. Helena cook from the Cape. I believe he means to spread himself when he takes up his residence *solus* at the mine."

"Is anyone certain it is going to be *solus?*" asked Father Drago, and some laughed at his sly air of mischief, and some looked startled.

"By Jove *that's* an idea!" exclaimed Dick and happening to glance across at Hibiscus de Wilton, observed that she had flushed pink. Which gave him a further idea, and caused him to stare so hard that the pink turned to bright crimson, and no one could fail to notice it. But Miss de Wilton was not without a certain aplomb, and quick to regain herself, smiled it off.

"At any rate *solus* or (what's the Latin for double, Father? Oh, *duo*—thank you) the row at Tagati seems certainly to the good as far as the rest of us are concerned, for we shall now have two houses to dine and dance at, where before we had only one."

"Queen! you've said it," chuckled Father Drago and the subject was laughed away.

"Does that girl love Paget Vyner?" Felicia wondered, and instantly her heart rapped back an answer. "If so, she can have him with pleasure." Not that it had taken Felicia till then to realize that nothing could ever come of that man's passion for herself. She had known it all along, his prolonged absence only making it more certain, instead of working the other way about. No doubt he was a fascinating fellow:—but not for her! No more her mate than was Castleton. Who *was* her mate, she carefully refrained from enquiring of herself. And, as ever, her eyes carefully re-

frained from looking in the direction of that cool brown man at the head of the table. Never once had her glance lain in his, except in antagonism, since the day she went to Salisbury taking with her that strange pain, as of a needle being thrust home to the core of her heart. And he and she never talked with one another. Certainly (she thought) he must know she suspected him, for between them a wide gulf yawned, containing dark and hidden things. And the secrets that he shared with Stella, constituted a barrier over which Felicia Lissell would do no more than sometimes give a scornful glance. For a moment now she let herself ponder on the apparent coldness those two were showing each other. Was it real, or only a blind? Just a pretence to make things easier? Loathsome thought! But illicit lovers are forced sometimes to practise these deceits! What a hateful world, alas! The girl sighed. She felt herself almost swamped by the dark melancholy engendered of such thoughts, and with an effort, pushing them away, she joined in the conversation that was rattling round the table. So far it had been of that sprightly type that might be described as entertaining without being elevating. But it happened that Felicia with certain things working in her mind, born of her recent dip into local politics, acquired both in the capital and on her journey back from it, began presently to introduce a few questions upon more serious issues than "Who was going to pay for Jimmie Browne's new car?"—"Would the Lovells stick together for a few months longer, now that he had got into Parliament?"—"Would anyone ever be able to stop Cowan Horsley from writing to the daily papers, or if he *must* write, teach him to do so coherently, comprehensively, and with a glimmering of intelligence? . . . and whether after all, when it came to writing, he could really sign his name, or was it only a rumour?"

To the query as to what serious political Associations existed in the country, Felicia was glibly answered that there were the Rhodesian Party (Government), Progressive

Party (Opposition) and Labour (Opposition); but it only needed someone to add gravely:

"And there's our Dorp Egg Circle—the one Association in the country that gives a square deal to its members," for levity to break out again.

"*And* the Advisory Board for Settlers: the only thing they settle being the hash of the poor plurry settlers!"

"*And* the Maize-pool, formed to protect the growers of mealies against victimization that exists only in their mealie-muddled heads!"

"*And* the Native Labour Bureau:—for supplying labour, *at a price* in a country that *teems* with it!"

"And don't leave out the Dorp Rate-payers' Association, for the Lord's sake. I once went, just for luck, to a Meeting convened at 8 P.M. one evening in the lounge of the Midland . . . At 9 P.M. the Rate-payers, poor deluded asses, began creeping and shuffling into their places . . . Germans, Jews, Greeks, Poles, and a sprinkling of English, and forthwith proceeded to elect as Chairman a Semitic gentleman of German origin, *who wasn't even a Rate-payer* . . . Hurrah!"

"Oh! *And* the Road Board! Don't forget that great Body of men! May God help them in their deliberations and may God help us, when travelling in the wet season, or any other season, over the roads they never make nor mend!"

"*And* the Kennel Club . . . very doggy affair!"

"*And* the Rhodesian Pioneers and Early Settlers . . . only Society that, unfortunately, doesn't increase in numbers."

"I am one of them . . . if that's any good," proclaimed Buffalo Bill.

"And I," said Yank.

"You would be," Stella commented under her breath.

"We are all pioneers when it comes to the grave," Dick produced this, one of his odd fragments of wisdom. The grave word (in more senses than one!) seemed out of place amid that gay chatter, like an ice-droplet let fall upon an

omelette *au Kirsche*. But the omelette soon flared up again. When they had exhausted their wit, Felicia told them patiently that what she really yearned to hear was about such burning problems, if any, as lay at the very heart of the country's existence. She had in fact begun to wonder if there *were* any problems worth bothering about at all, and if so, whether anyone in this *galére* cared anything about them, anyhow? Or were they all in Rhodesia, just because, as someone said: "It happened to be a pleasant place to live in, with endless 'tick' to be got, and mercifully few occasions for exercising the poor old mental apparatus?"

Grand reasons for living in a grand country, she thought ironically, and her glance ranged round the table, from Fenn's blue enigmatic eyes, to Randal grimly-grumpy; Dick busy with the whisky; the prospector clean and spruce in his dark shirt, but carefully dumb in the presence of ladies; Yank also dumb, with glance roving out of the window to the veld beyond; the Biscuit a useless young cub of the true "waster type," already too pink and puffy from over-indulgence in Ponjola; Father Drago listening now with the bright eye of the fanatic to Fenn's statement that the biggest cloud ahead, not only over Rhodesia but the whole of South Africa, was the Native Problem.

"You have a small white community, mentally alert and physically active, as against an immense black community, mentally otiose, but physically fitter and more active than we are, because it's *their* climate, and has been for countless centuries. *They* increase at an alarming rate, we very slowly, and it's only a matter of time—a simple economic fact —before white is swamped by black."

"Unless of course Divine Providence steps in," said Castleton hopefully, with an impious wink behind Father Drago's back, "and blots a few hundred millions of 'em out with some 'civilized' disease. It's a way Divine Providence sometimes has . . . that, or a nice little war, like the last."

"Don't lay the sins of civilization at the door of Divine

Providence," said the priest sombrely. "Instead tell me, do any of you consider that the native of this country has a square deal?"

He was answered at once by a chorus of male voices, that the nigger got as good a deal as he was entitled to,—or could jolly-well expect, anyway.

"With the last I agree," smiled Father Drago sadly. "Certainly it is carefully impressed upon us by the Government that the Government pamper and spoil the native, but I haven't noticed much of it myself. Because a cook-boy is occasionally let off lightly by a 'Beak' for 'cheeking his missus,' it does not make up to the rest of the race, nor to a single unit of it, for being deprived of customs, codes, lands. . . ."

"Oh, come come! He *has* been allocated land! What about the 'Reserves?'"

"Some of the poorest land in the country . . . the best as you know has been monopolized by the big companies and the Government."

"To be retailed out at ruinous prices to poor unsuspecting settlers like me . . ." complained Dick, smiling with delight to think that *he* at least need no longer be described as such.

"Oh well," proffered the Biscuit, with the casual philosophy of the rootless, "The solution of the Black problem won't be needed in *our* time . . . why worry?" Fenn looked at him contemptuously.

"These things don't stand still. Such a subject cannot be eternally shelved, or handed over to Committees and Commissions. It shouts to be tackled at once by men who know the country and the native."

"Thank God I ain't a politician," breathed Dick fervently, "So it ain't my affair."

"Hear, hear!" cried the rest, enthusiastically.

"Any more burning questions?" asked Felicia with a certain dryness, scarcely knowing whether to be amused, or,

like Fenn, contemptuous of their anxiety to have done with any matter of large import. With ironic laughter, they passed her all the cool things to be found on the table: iced-cup, syphons, mousse, anything to cool her ardour and shut her up. But when she maliciously persisted, Fenn handed her three economic dry bones of contention to try her teeth on, one atop of the other:

"Irrigation, Land Settlement, The Railway Question."

"*Now* will you be good?" Randal asked her mockingly, but with an approving eye, for it pleased him, that Fenn should unwittingly be proving what his friend had bragged of him—that he had a thinking machine behind that non-committal face.

"What about Irrigation?" she asked, while the other women clamoured what about dessert, what about coffee, and what about cigarettes? And Stella sweetly enquired:

"Are you turning into a blue-stocking, Shonnie? Or thinking of setting up as our next Member?" And while Fenn was "filling in" under the headings he had given, Mrs. Cardross turned her back on him, talking loudly to the prospector.

"In the first wet season we've had for three years, you have only to watch the millions of tons of water rushing away to the ocean, to wonder why a moment is lost before promulgating a scheme for conserving some of it for future droughts. Conservation of water saved Australia, and is saving the Union . . . *we* do nothing!"

"As for the Land: no comprehensive and feasible arrangement has yet been arrived at, though Lord Cave at the Head of the Commission for Unalienated Lands (A Voice: 'Not the best in the country, you can bet your life!') had a shot at it, as a result of which said lands 'became the property of the country' whatever that may mean! I only know that the B.S.A. Company[1] got the pick of it. . . ."

[1] British South Africa Company, once the Chartered Company.

"And the Natives got their 'Reserves,'" slid in Father Drago with dark Irish disdain on his face.

"The question of the Railways," continued Fenn ironically smiling, "Together with the B.S.A. Company Minerals monopoly, compose a situation sufficiently Gilbertian to be accepted of course with enthusiasm by Rhodesians."

"You let Rhodesians alone, my boy. . . ."

"Fie on you! . . . after making so much money out of one of our mines!"

"Surely a curious form of Government that entered Office with no rights over the mineral wealth of the country, and no say in the Railways, and only after Lord Cave's adjudication, any say in the land. The Mineral Monopoly makes little difference to the individual, who carries on much as in old days, but why people should guarantee interest on capital invested in the railways of their country, yet have no word in the running of it, its fares, freightage rates, etc. licks comprehension. . . ."

"Shime!" cried the mob, delighted to break loose again.

"It affects our very life-blood!"

"I should say so! Didn't I pay two-and-six yesterday, for a tin baking-dish not worth sixpence? and didn't Selkiem's have the nerve to tell me it was not *their* greed, but the Railway's?"

"And doesn't my chemist stick me a pound for a bottle of Glyco-thymoline that I can get for eight bob in London or New York? . . . He shan't be my chemist any longer though, drat him!"

"Shime indeed!"

"Three Hoots for our noble Government!"

"If," continued Fenn blandly, "we had accepted the terms of the Union Government in 1923, and joined up with the South, *they* would have taken over control of Railway, Land and Minerals, as any real Government should—" but he got no further. This was man-handling the pet lamb indeed,

treading on it, kicking it in the ribs! The whole table rose at him.

"*Union* forsooth! What do we know of Union? . . . or care? We are RHODESIANS! . . . A free people . . . English of the English. No dirty Bojers up here, thank you! . . . No *tall* for us! Well! What next? Really, Fenn, if you don't take the whole Bakery! D'jever? What serpent is This we have nourished in our bosoms!"

Even Felicia stared at him, startled, for already she had grown accustomed to the idea of Rhodesians being a race apart, superior to and far in advance of anything to be found down South where Dutch and English are, politically at least, lumped together under the one word Unionist. She knew of course, that Rhodesia after enormous agitation and excitement had rejected Union with the South, by means of a Referendum, but, not having been in Rhodesia in 1923 when the Referendum was taken, she did not realize, that though a majority of youthful light-heads, and thoughtless we-are-a-race-apart boosters won the day, (incidentally, with a large Government majority in favour of Isolation, the issue could scarcely claim to have been fought without official bias) a good proportion of *thinking* Rhodesians declared themselves for Union, and fought hard for it, seeing therein the only hope of eventual salvation for the white race in Africa.

It now seemed clear that Fenn had been one of the vanquished pro-Unionists, but in case of doubt in any mind present, he declared it, as soon as he could make himself heard, together with the opinion that the "turning down" of Union had not only been a stupid blundering impertinence, but exhibited enormous lack of patriotism and statesmanship. In the renewed uproar about him, such graceful terms as heretic blackleg, even scab, were hurled at him, but, from behind the friendly din of laughter, the only real viciousness came from Stella. Her mouth curling with scorn she rose, exclaiming angrily:

"No more of this beastly subject! Let's go and have

coffee in the stoep and see if we can wash away the flavour of such rotten disloyalty to Rhodesia!"

Patrick Fenn's withers were unwrung, however. He stood smilingly holding open the dining-room door for his guests to file out to the verandah, and the jests and jibes they cast at him, rolled off like water from a stone. Felicia, the last to go, smiled back at him. She couldn't help it. She had been not only intensely interested, but amused and stimulated.

"So *you* were for Union? . . . I'm glad!" she said, meaning glad he was for *something,* not content just to sit still and purr, to play at "farming," to wallow in the money got out of his mine, to live a pleasant life in a pleasant place, and "follow" the mob and the mob's opinions. At her warm words a slight darkening of blood showed under the clear tan of his skin, and though he answered evenly enough, something new and powerful came into his eyes.

"Of course I was . . . and *am.* Rhodes would have been. We should be in the Union at this moment if he were alive. Do you suppose he meant Rhodesia to be a little isolated community of people sitting in the middle of a continent, supporting themselves by taking in each other's washing? Rhodes thought universally. Extension *with* Union was his idea. He knew it was the only hope for the whites of South Africa."

But while his tongue said these things his eyes were saying something else. What hers said in return she did not know, but a deep wave of warmth leapt up from her heart, flooding her face.

. . . . . .

All Rhodesian stoeps are family camping grounds, used for every mortal thing, from early-morning-tea to after-dinner-dancing (if boarded), and sleeping in on hot nights. But the Poinsettia stoep was more than an ordinary addition to mere houseroom, resembling rather an Italian loggia with

its breadth, tall white columns supporting teak beams and thatch overhead, shining floor of polished mopani wood, green tubs full of begonia, fern, and "painted ladies." Necessarily the spaces between the columns were wire-netted in a country where the view must be sacrificed to immunity from mosquitos, flies and sun-glare; but against the wire bougainvillæa lianes spread themselves in fantastic manner, and such sunshine as could penetrate, came darting through the vivid blossom in slender wine-coloured shafts.

Stella had taken up her position of hostess over the coffee-tray, with an air of owning the house if not the world; and her behaviour roused little surprise. She was considered by most of them an old enough friend of Fenn's to first insult him if she liked, and dispense his coffee afterwards. It was well-known, besides, that she had an unpleasant way of requiting those who unfavourably remarked her little ways. Only upon the lips of Clarry de Wilton, who never shirked the battle in the gate, sat a sarcastic smile as she quippishly observed:

"You'll have to cut yourself in two, Stella, now that Padge is back at Tagati."

Dick had lingered with the Biscuit, and Randal over the port, or probably this remark would not have been made, for Clarry never intentionally aimed at any but an enemy. The rest, however, including the recipient of the arrow, were too interested in the piece of news to pay much attention to the phrase conveying it.

"Padge back? . . . When? How d'you know? . . . Who saw him?"

Felicia was the only one who noticed that Hibiscus had gone pink again. *She* evidently had seen him. Well, good luck to her if she really cared for the fellow!

"He called at our place last night," Clarry was saying. "Had just got off the train, and heading straight for Tagati. He's sure to have gone over to Manana to-day, I should think."

But Stella had good reasons for thinking quite *au contraire*. She darted a glance of curiosity at Fenn and knew what the extra stoniness of his expression meant. It was in *his* plans that Vyner should stay at the Cape until Felicia had gone, passing out of the country by the East Coast, with no earthly chance of their meeting. He would have to learn, thought Stella, that he could not control the movements of other people, working them about like pieces on a board, to suit his own fancy! A flash of spiteful delight at his chagrin lit up for a moment the tortuous passages of her mind, but did not last. Delight cannot live well in dark places, with no companions but hatred, envy, and a great hunger.

Some of the party were presently on the move. Heat or no heat, the priest had to get back to his Mission. Buffalo Bill offered to drive the prospector to the Ran-dan Mine, where the manager was a friend of his, and a job might possibly be wangled. Yank Breddon, too, went off on some lay of his own, likely, he said, to detain him a day or two; at which Stella remarked to the Biscuit, *sotto voce,* that he could be "detained for ever" as far as she was concerned. Strange what a down she had, with no special reason she could name, on the old hunting man!

Among the others, there arose talk of settling down to Bridge since the de Wiltons would not be moving until it was cooler, but Randal took it upon himself to forbid any further exertions to Felicia and Stella, ordering them as their medical man, to go and rest, or he would not allow them out with the guns, next day. Neither was sorry to obey.

"Dinner not before 8.30, if that will suit you? It's rather a scramble to get back earlier if one's shooting!" Fenn called out as they went, and they gladly answered to the effect that the later it was the better.

In the large cool room allotted to her, Felicia found French windows giving directly on to a private loggia, wired-in, but with its own little secret door into a rose-

garden beyond. It had also its own private supply of bougainvillæa from which was suspended another family of grassy nests, dancing with the movements of bright, golden, chattering forms. She stood out there for a moment drinking in the perfume of roses, heavy as incense under the powerful sun rays, and an *ikwesi,* the Rhodesian blackbird, gave her a bold sweet call from the top of a jacaranda tree.

"Where are you going? Rhodesia's for you!" he whistled, and she stared at him, sitting there, light glinting on his blue-black plumage. Overhead a flock of great black and white storks sailed silently across the house, swooping toward the river.

"Why are you going? Rhodesia's for you?" the *ikwesi* called again, as clear as a bird could call it.

"I don't know," she answered, and suddenly her heart thrilled with a strange joy she had never known, and began to sing a song of its own. Going indoors she lay down on the bed, and immediately fell into delicious sleep.

When she awoke the sun had just gone down. She knew it by the alert feel in the air, and the gentle rustle of leaf and flower lifting expectant for night dews after long ordeal by fire. Wonderfully refreshed by her sleep, she quickly splashed cold water over her arms and throat, and got into a diaphanous demi-semi gown of the kind that serves for afternoon as well as evening. To put on a really *décolletté* gown when some of the men might possibly be in shirt sleeves was out of the question. Dick for one, as she knew, never dressed for dinner.

Pagg had packed one or two little pastel-shaded frocks among her things, but though it had been unnecessary and inexpedient in such sultry weather to go into mourning for the Countess, Felicia had resolved that at least she would refrain from colour for a time.

"Absent thee from felicity awhile"—

Hamlet, dying, had said to his Horatio, and it seemed to her that when you loved colour it was the least little gift you could make to a lost friend to "absent yourself" from it awhile.

Dressed at last, the delicately tinted shapeliness of her arms and shoulders hinted at rather than expressed under filmy cloud and lace, she left her room with a hope of wandering alone in the garden, but the obligation was on her first of seeing what the rest of them were about and whether she was required. Wherefore she made her return by the way she had come, through the house, rather than via her own private stoep. But there was not a soul about, and the whole house dreamed in stillness and the perfume of roses, for doors and windows had been set wide to let in the freshness of evening. In the dining room an immense tray with decanters and glasses stood ready for the ritual of "sun-down," but the devotees of that ceremony had of course not yet returned from their shoot. As for Stella, Felicia neither knew nor cared where she might be. The only sound of life was a far-off murmur of native voices from a direction she adjudged to be that of kitchen and domestic quarters.

Nothing, then, to prevent her from making her expedition, as she had hoped, alone; for if you are a real garden lover this is the only possible way to enjoy your passion; and at the end of half an hour she had explored every glory of this one, with every possibility of further glories, and could easily have passed an exam. on the trees and flowers to be found therein. By that time, too, she had arrived at the summer-house, which, as she well knew, lay some way from the house, surrounded by a sort of lawn—all Rhodesian lawns are "of a sort" only—and thick surrounding bushes.

It was a big square hut with overhanging eaves as substitute for verandah, and though its thatch was slightly dilapidated by the depredations of birds, it had a substantial

look by reason of sturdy brick walls. Inside, too, it still preserved a comfortable appearance, and was clean as a new pin, though since she had last been there, its spaciousness had been intruded upon by a group of packing cases and piled-up furniture. Still, there was plenty of room to move about, a table in the middle with a box of cigarettes and ash-trays on it, easy chairs, and the big cushioned divan she remembered of old. And having entered, as anyone would naturally enter an inviting room set in a garden for that specific purpose, she helped herself, even more naturally, to a cigarette, and glanced around.

The first thing of interest was a rose-wood desk standing against the heaped-up bits of furniture, and evidently part of the consignment. Somehow she imagined she had seen it before, but what particularly pleased her was its likeness to one she possessed at home, that had belonged to her father and about which, for her, clung very happy memories, because it contained a secret drawer known only to her father and herself. He had been in the habit of depositing surprises for her in that drawer, and at different times of her life she had found there her mother's pearls, restrung into a necklace suitable for a young girl; her first cheque book; the little gold signet ring that she was now wearing, and lots of other exciting surprises.

Thinking of these things, in an absent manner she stretched out her hand and let down the flap of the desk, for, that it would be both unlocked and empty, standing there in an open summer-house, she took for granted. And so it was unlocked of course. Whereupon, in pure idleness, and with the dreamy association of ideas it had induced, she slid her hand inside the arched middle pigeon-hole, and pressed upon the magic spot, which in the old desk was wont to respond by opening and revealing to her enchanted vision something specially for her. And behold! This desk did the same! A drawer flew open and outward, exposing to

sudden view something that was indeed hers; a bedroom slipper of soft red Algerian leather!

She stood there staring, and for a moment her body had a sensation as of turning to stone, while her mind leaped back to that night months ago when she had fled, leaving this same red slipper behind her in a strange man's room. And at the memory, and of certain suspicions that had haunted her, and were now in a way verified, her body woke up again, with a surge of hot blood that rushed to her very brows. In the same instant a sound near the door of the hut caused her instinctively with a darting movement to push the drawer and its contents out of sight. There was not time, however, to put back the flap of the desk, or even attempt to, for Stella already stood in the doorway, drawling sweetly:

"Oh, here you are! I *wondered* where you'd got to!" A certain element of surprise, not to say curiosity, tinged her voice, and Felicia felt thankful to be holding a lighted cigarette, for that helped somehow to lend to the situation an air of casualness that she could not otherwise have achieved.

She replied with a coolness she was far from feeling. "Yes, I came in here by accident, and was just looking at this desk. It's an exact copy of one my father owned." She moved away from it as she spoke, and sat down.

"Fenn's desk," observed Stella indifferently. "All this junk is his . . . brought over from Tagati, and stuffed in here, I suppose, till he has time to 'place' it about the house!"

The girl remembered then, the circumstances in which she had seen it before—that day at the Mine, when they had talked books! Fenn's desk . . . and with her slipper in its secret drawer! She felt the blood creeping away from her heart again and a return of that stone-like sensation. Stella meanwhile having helped herself to a cigarette, was just beating up a cushion for her back on the divan, when another shadow fell across the doorway. A native ap-

peared—a boy whose face seemed only vaguely familiar to Felicia, but whom Stella recognised at once.

"Bointjees! What do *you* want?"

Bointjees tendered a letter which Stella, taking from his hand, glanced at, seemed unable to decipher its address in the growing dimness of the hut, and carried outside to examine. The boy remained, an uncertain look on his face, but she turned with a gesture of dismissal.

"All right, Bointjees . . . *chella lo Baas longela.*" (Tell your master 'All right'). Bointjees still hesitated, continuing to look doubtful, until she sharply ordered him to *"Hambili!"* He *hambili*-ed then with palpable unwillingness, and she stood looking after him with a frown before opening the letter, skimming swiftly through it and thrusting it out of sight.

"A message for Dick," she mentioned briefly. But Felicia, though noting what was passing with her external eye, had a mind completely detached from Stella and her doings. She was thinking fiercely:

"I *must* have my slipper. I *will* have my slipper," and her only interest in the letter was that she hoped it would mean Stella's having to go away and answer it, leaving her alone in the hut; but nothing so opportune occurred. Mrs. Cardross banked herself comfortably with cushions on the divan, and stayed chatting idly until the voices of the men were heard, recalling them both to their duties as guests.

. . . . . .

Dinner and the evening that followed were to Felicia like a nightmare that would never end, but at last she was back in the room from which a few hours before she had issued so happily, so surely almost "fey?" For now she felt deeply dully, miserable, with a misery she would not examine. It was enough to know misery was there, like a thorn fastened in the flesh with enough protruding to make touching it an agony! The one person she could bless was Randal, for

persisting in being a doctor, and in such capacity ordering his patients "early bed" and insisting that the men as well should make an early night of it, so as to secure absolute quietude.

Afterwards she found it difficult to remember very distinctly all that had passed between the time of leaving the summer-house with Stella until final goodnights were said. Certain incidents, and a specially unforgettable one, stood out strongly, but for the rest her mind was vague as a mind will be, when, having received a severe shock, it is busy working round and round every incident connected with that shock to the exclusion of all else.

She remembered playing bridge for awhile, and losing rubber after rubber with Castleton against Randal and Stella. And once she had sat apart with Dick, listening to his plans for a trip alone with his wife, soon. His eyes had glistened with a humble joy, and a phrase had come unbidden to her mind: "Worshipping at an empty shrine!"

During another interlude Stella had made cocktails—for that was what they really amounted to, though she had a name of her own for them: *Whispers in the night! Thumps in the Night* was more like it, someone had said, and they certainly were thumping in size, but everyone drank a couple of them, even Felicia, whose usual limit was one before dinner. Then, Randal had played the piano, just inside the sitting-room door, while the rest of them listened, grouped silently in the stoep. Strange what a gift of musical expression that sulky, stubby man possessed, with what tender charm he gave them Debussy, Chopin, and then Beethoven! Seldom had Felicia heard anyone "understand with fingers" as he did, the *Appassionata,* in its slow glorious movement, its passion and its pain. She would *never* forget his playing that, not only because of its special reference to her own life, but because Dick, to her astonishment and displeasure, called attention to the fact . . . one certainly never intended to be published to all and sundry.

"You ought to be exceedingly proud, Shonnie," he observed with the owl-like solemnity of a man who has had three cocktails on top of countless whiskies, his blood-shot gaze fixed gravely upon her, "to be named Appassionata after that magnificent work, Beethoven's masterpiece!"

"What?" gasped Castleton as though he had been hit in the wind, and during the immediate hush even the piano was stilled. Felicia flushed scarlet, giving Dick an indignant look, but he sat there nodding sapiently, like one of those toy mandarins that go on for hours if once they are given a start. Besides he was delighted with himself for knowing something hitherto concealed from Castleton.

"The man in love with the girl! And didn't know—Hurrah!" thought he.

With a complacent leer he addressed the bewildered Nigel:

"You didn't know that our Shonnie's second name was Appassionata, did you? . . . hence the pet name, you see."

"I didn't know *you* knew either, Dick," said Felicia, and was about to add angrily: "It being an entirely private matter, not meant for the use of the rabble," when Stella's trilling laugh arose.

"*Appassionata!* How too fantastic! . . . but *just like* silly parents. Don't care how ridiculous they make us look when we are no longer babies!"

And just like *her* to throw dust and derision on what was beautiful, thought Felicia furiously. She stood up suddenly, straight and tall. It seemed the last unbearable straw of this unbearable evening that the name bestowed on her by the father she had adored, should be bandied jeeringly about in this *galére*. She could have struck the smile from that mocking face, but the voice of Patrick Fenn, cool and tonic as water, fell upon the heated moment:

"There is nothing ridiculous about such a name, but rather as Dick has said something to be proud of . . . something fair and splendid to live by to the end of life."

As suddenly as she had risen Felicia found herself sitting down again, saved from she knew not what impulsive act that might have shamed her breeding, and that fair name chosen for her in love.

"Of course you *would* be sentimental, Pat, on the subject of parents!" said the tormentor, and the friendly melody of the laughter in which she delivered the thrust might have deadened its cruelty for some people. But she knew her man, how to reach him under his fifth rib, and meant to punish him for his interference. Fenn, whatever he may have felt, gave no sign, but with a careless air said the bravest thing Felicia thought she had heard in her life, and in the saying wiped out, in her sight at least, many misdeeds.

"Yes . . . a nameless vagabond might easily become over-sentimental about other people's parents; that is understandable perhaps: but it doesn't really make any difference to the essential beauty of the matter under discussion!"

"The matter under discussion!" Felicia's heart had thanked him for sparing her another sickening repetition of her name. But *what* an incident, and what an evening! How she would thank God when it was all over . . . which was not yet! There was still that to do which would require all her nerve, but which *must* be done before she could ever sleep in peace again. It had become an obsession with her, an all-absorbing, pressing need, to retrieve her slipper. The matter seemed almost like retrieving honour itself, for at least it composed evidence of shame and dishonour in others, and indirectly, involved her own. Until she could get her property safely back, and be able to dismiss the hateful incident from her memory, life she felt would be intolerable.

So her mind was made up, her plan of action clear, not for nothing had she been so distrait all the evening!—to steal out when all was quiet to the summer-house, open again the secret drawer and subtract that which lay therein. Nothing could have been more propitious for her than the Doctor's mandate of "early bed." The men now retired to their

tents, which were at quite another part of the grounds, Stella fortunately had her lodging at the other end of the house, and everything favoured a completely unobserved excursion!

Putting on a little dark cloak over her white dress, and soft heelless shoes, she stole out at last by her secret door into the silent garden. There was no moon overhead, only the rose-sparkle of a myriad stars set in depths of intensest violet, even as the silence itself composed a myriad infinitesimal creature voices, with never a human sound.

She had a little electric torch with her . . . no-one is fool enough to walk the veld on a dark night without carrying means for scanning the path from time to time. This path, however, was sufficiently clear and simple, and in a few minutes she had, rather breathlessly, reached her destination. Only, a tiny stone having worked itself into her loose shoe, her first thought on arrival, after one brief flash of the torch around the hut, was to sit down on the divan and shake out the shoe. And to her horror, as she sat there, ridding herself of this penance, she heard footsteps, stealthy as had been her own but of heavier calibre, on the path outside! The approaching flicker of a torch, too, established the fact that someone besides herself was abroad and bound for the summer-house! In an instant she had sprung up and reached the little curtained recess where the dressing-table and powder bowl resided.

Only just in time! A second later a man entered, through the thin silk curtain, and during the brief flash with which he too inspected the surroundings, she saw his height and bulk, and breathing rather quickly like one who has hurried, crossed the hut and sat himself down on the divan she had just vacated. Barely had he done this when still *another* form, unheralded by sound or light, entering upon the very heels of the first, stood in the doorway. This time, for purpose of inspection, a match was struck, and sharp upon the impact and flash followed the sound of voices . . . voices

that Felicia recognised, though they were brutal and uncompromising in tone, using such words as men who are enemies fling at each other when they believe themselves alone.

"What the hell are *you* doing here?"

"Didn't come to meet *you,* anyway. You can be jolly-well sure of that!" (only Vyner didn't say jolly).

Fenn and Vyner! The hidden girl stood dumbfounded, frozen into inaction.

"You've no business in my grounds! Nor business back from the Cape, for that matter, without my permission. It was in the bargain that you should not return until—it suited *me.*"

"Until Miss Lissell had gone, in fact?"

"Leave that lady's name out!"

"It's true though . . . and anyway, I changed my mind."

"You *would* . . . having about as much sense of honour as my foot."

"That's all right. Neither you nor your foot worry me much."

"You are not going to use my place for your intrigues, however."

"Sh . . . !" muttered Vyner, as well he might, for yet another torch flickered and another step stealthily approached! This time it was Stella who stepped noiselessly into the hut and threw a search ray around!

"Pat!" she exclaimed, obviously taken aback, then: "Padge!" The last surprise, however, was not quite so genuine.

"Yes," observed Fenn bleakly. "All arrived for the rendezvous, apparently."

She stood for a second peering from one to the other, then regaining possession of the situation, clicked out the light and answered him coolly, "I don't remember inviting *you* to it!"

"It *is* a rendezvous, then!" said he slowly. "My God!

If you're not a pair! . . . with Dick lying just over the way!"

"Don't be Pecksniffian," was Stella's reply. But when she spoke again an instant later, an extraordinary change had come into her voice, a melancholy cadence that the hidden listener had never heard from those lips before.

"Tell me, Pat . . . have *you* never been a woman's lover? and waited for her in the darkness of the night . . . by stealth?"

Fenn made a short, harsh sound. Otherwise silence reigned in the dimness of the hut. Softly Stella answered her own question.

"You know you have . . . and *for me!*"

Still no answer from the man she addressed.

"You needn't mind Padge," she pursued with sad mockery. "He has always known that you and I were lovers, once . . . and has had to put up with it, haven't you, Padge?"

If there was any answer to this query, Vyner did not choose to make it, but Fenn broke the silence at last, violently.

"Don't bracket me with that crafty adulterer!"

"Hush," murmured Stella, but he would not be hushed.

"It's one thing to take a woman when you think she's free, and *for you only*. But quite another to carry on an intrigue with her under the cloak of friendship with her husband. To eat a man's salt while you steal his wife!" . . .

"Hush!" chided Stella in a tone more usual to her. "We don't want Dick attracted to this happy reunion . . . though, being tight as usual, he is probably fast asleep long ago."

For a moment the consideration of her cynicism distracted Fenn from his personal rancour:

"God! Stella! I sometimes wonder what your heart is made of."

She looked at him in silence, before answering again with that soft and bitter melancholy.

"*You* ought to know . . . I gave it to you years ago . . . And I swear by my last breath that no one has had it since."

He laughed briefly, sardonically. "Looks like it!" he said.

"It is true enough." Her voice, dragged suddenly, had ended in a long sob. But Fenn remained unmoved.

"If it's true, so much the worse for you. It means nothing to me. You've a strange way of showing even what you call friendship . . . incivility and insult at every turn!"

"Because I love you . . ." she said wildly, "because I want you . . . I have only kept on with Padge to be in touch with you . . . to see you daily."

"That will do . . ."

"Haven't I tried to get you back, time after time? . . . and haven't you repulsed me . . . maddened me, almost to the point of murder?"

"Murder?" he repeated sombrely. "Whose murder . . . and why? Nothing can bring back lost dreams, Stella . . . or mend broken faith. But what's the good of standing here, talking!"

"I was wondering," observed Vyner dryly. "But since you two appear to be entertained——"

"I'll go," said Fenn abruptly. "Only, Vyner! once and for all, let this be the last time I find you on my property." He did not wait for an answer, but as he reached the doorway, a dark silhouette outlined against the darker violet of the skies, Stella threw out a last cry:

"Forgive me, Pat, for what I said to-night. It is all part of my pain . . . that goading necessity to goad at you . . . but God knows I am sorry!" . . . there seemed genuine despair in her voice.

"All right," he said. "Goodnight!"

Afterwards, when the light sound of his feet passing through the garden had died away, she recovered herself enough to throw a taunt at Vyner:

"Quite like old times meeting *you* here, my dear Padge!"

"I realize of course," he answered dispassionately, "that you got my note to Miss Lissell . . . and opened it!"

"Naturally. You don't suppose I was going to let an unmarried girl in my care meet you here, late at night?" Vyner sighed like a very tired man, as indeed he was.

"You're the most unprincipled woman I know, Stella!" He muttered it completely without admiration.

"Quite a distinction!"

"You've managed to make a pretty good mess all round to-night, however."

"You ought to be thanking me for keeping you from having your head broken, as it certainly would have been if he had suspected it was her you were plotting to see!"

"I can look after my own head, thanks!"

"You always were an ungrateful beast."

"Sorry!"

"As for meeting Shonnie, try again, if you like" . . .

"Thanks, I intend to."

". . . and I'll promise not to interfere. After all, now that Dick has got his money it would suit me if you married her."

It was at this juncture that the person alluded to, in a state of foaming rage, chose to break up a situation that had gone steadily from bad to worse, and now was become most vilely intolerable. Also, knowing what she did of these two heartless, faithless ones, she now felt utterly callous of what *they* felt or thought at her sudden appearance and the realization that she had heard everything.

"I'm sorry," she said perfunctory but raging, as they first threw a light on her, then drew back, staggered. "I have been eavesdropping, but entirely against my will. The rôle was thrust upon me. I came here to fetch something, and as almost at once two men appeared, I hid, hoping they would go away. Instead *you* arrived, Stella, and immediately things were said, and continued to be said, that made me feel I could not make my presence known without . . .

without absolutely shaming three people to death"—her voice had sunk almost to a whisper. Neither of the others spoke, and after a second she went on, rather unsteadily: "I can only say that I will try and forget what I have heard . . . blot out every word completely from my memory. No one would *want* to remember such . . . such awful . . ."

"Shonnie," broke in the man, low and pleading, "won't you let me tell *my* side . . ." but the very sound of her name on his lips was enough to arouse again all her revulsion.

"Colonel Vyner, you must please never speak to me again . . . unless it can't be helped . . . in the presence of other people, and to save comment. But any kind of friendship with you is over—finished for ever."

As she moved quickly to the door Stella's voice, nervous and disjointed, arrested her momentarily:

"Shonnie! you won't say? . . . you won't *do* anything to let Dick think . . ."

Felicia turned on her contemptuously. "Haven't I told you I mean to blot the whole miserable thing from my mind? But of course I must go." Yet a spasm of pity seized her for this unhappy woman, who, possessing beauty and brains, and with love at her disposal, was sunk so deep in duplicity and faithlessness, that life could surely never shape itself into anything fair and lovely for her again! "I'm sorry," she said quietly, "I'll try not to do anything that will harm you . . . or show in any way . . . but it will be impossible for me to stay at Manana any more."

On that she left them, going swiftly through the fragrant dew laden garden, to reach at last, by the secret door, her room, which, full of faint shadows and fresh with rose perfume, seemed a haven of sweetness and whiteness after those dark waters into which she had looked.

Only as she laid her head upon the pillow did she remember that what she had set out to do had not been done. Still,

recovery of her slipper seemed not to matter so much . . . now!

. . . . . .

Stella kept her room all next morning, and indeed no-one made any appearance until luncheon time, when Fenn greeted Felicia with the polite hope that her night had been a good one. For an instant her glance flickered, startled, but his was clear, and obviously free of any meaning but the conventional English one. How could it be otherwise, knowing nothing as he did of *her* knowledge of the night and its hidden doings? He and Dick were just in from the lands, "seeing over the place," as men term those joyful, aimless strolls they are so fond of taking. The other two had made an early dash for the Dorp. As for Stella, she looked so fresh and gay, that it was no wonder Fenn forgot to enquire concerning the goodness of *her* night. She proffered the information voluntarily, however.

"I've had a perfectly splendid night and morning, and feel like one John Smith. What about that shooting, Pat?"

"The shooting's all right . . . if you feel up to it, towards evening?" He looked enquiringly at Felicia, who answered promptly:

"*I* do."

He turned to Randal:

—"and your medico allows it?"

"Medico be blowed," laughed Stella, "*we're* all right. It's rather imperative, too, to get in as much as we can, because," she addressed herself to all in general and Dick in particular, "Shonnie and I have been talking things over, and she wants to be off earlier than originally planned. I don't blame her either . . . I should love to be shaking the dust of Rhodesia off my own feet!"

No-one else took the news quite so blithely. In fact, Dick looked petrified, Randal sulkier than ever, and Castleton flabbergasted, but only for a moment, reflecting, as he did,

that there was nothing to prevent his being "off," too, by the same train and boat. What Fenn thought did not appear on the surface, though Stella scanned him narrowly. He merely said, with formal courtesy:

"I hope you won't cut *this* visit shorter than expected, Miss Lissell? That would be a disappointment to us all."

Stella at once opened her lips to reply, but Felicia, seeing the intention, nipped rather breathlessly ahead of her.

"I wouldn't dream of breaking up your party. It is only when we leave here that I really *must* move on."

"I thought we had you for another month at least!" croaked Dick dismally. Manana would never be quite the same without her, he thought.

"It's perfectly understandable that she wants to go, Dicky," said his wife. "But of course," to Felicia, "men never *will* understand that women love to change their minds and plans at a moment's notice. Besides, I think you are perfectly right, . . . the Maddox's would be really hurt if you didn't go to them for a little while."

Having successfully launched the news, without detriment to herself, of her guest's projected departure, throwing all the onus of changed plans where they did *not* belong, and making said visitor appear to be a thoroughly capricious person, she now embarked upon this entirely new piece of fiction about the Maddox's! Felicia would have liked to fell her to earth with one tersely descriptive word. But Dick was there, and poor Dick must never be hurt . . . by her at least. So she contented herself with murmuring dryly:

"You really ought to *start* a fancy work class, Stella—and specialize in embroidery!" . . .

Lunch over, they tried out a dozen new gramophone records brought back from the Dorp by Castleton: and to the dance-music, Stella, with grace and vivacity, did some light-foot "exhibition" *pas-seuls*. Nor bird in springtime more light-of-heart either, to all appearances! Whether they liked

her or not, the men's eyes were drawn to her as men's eyes always will be to a bird or woman of gay plumage and bright antics. Even against the mind's disapproval they admire them that way. Can't help it, poor fellows!

Neither could Felicia but admire the superb powers of camouflage, that enabled the other to carry on the game so spiritedly, smothering down defeat under laughter! . . . Always taking it for granted of course that there *was* a heart at all in that soft and downy bosom. And that, both in gaiety and melancholy she was not really acting all the time. But what human mind can judge the deeps of another human soul? If outward appearance deliberately sets itself to obscure *real* things, where is verity to be found? Well might jesting Pilate ask!

Felicia herself felt curiously at peace. Spite of the horrid revelations of the night, she now "knew where she was," so to speak, in relation to the rest of them, and relief tempered disgust. Other thoughts, too, brought repose!

Sometimes, as they all watched the dancing, she glanced at Fenn, and gauged that even as with her there was computation in his observation. The hardness, the implacability, of his expression gave her a sense of security, since she knew now that he used those qualities not dangerously, but for straight dealing. Thank God, she thought, no camouflage, no obscured verity there! What a blessing it was when people were simple, honest, and clean, in their methods of living!

They all met again at tea-time subsequent to starting for the shoot, as soon as the relentless sun had sunk low enough. Stella, all in white, was *très chic,* with breeches and Norfolk-coat of duck, and serviceable brogues and gaiters. Felicia's kit, too, was practical, but with special touches of her own: Breeches and loose coat of some pale grey flexible material; grey antelope boots and gaiters; a helmet, like everyone else, but unlike anyone else's . . . shadier, and lined with blue-green, that, above the curved mysterious face echoed itself

in the depths of her eyes. She was sparkling with an eagerness she could not conceal, and something in Fenn's keen eyes sparkled back at her as she came into the stoep.

"A lovely day for killing something," he smiled. "That's supposed to be the sporting attitude, isn't it?"

"Personally it's a libel," she answered, "I don't ever care to kill for killing's sake. It must be either for the pot, or else some dangerous beast that one is afraid of, like a lion or leopard." They sat down side by side on a long leather-laced settle. Stella across the way was pouring out tea, and Randal handing it round, while Castleton, having plunged a knife into a luscious-looking cake, munched a chunk himself and distributed others.

"Topping cake, by Jove!" he mumbled with his mouth full.

"Ought to be," Dick assented, wolfing hard, "made as it is with the best eggs, butter, cream and fruit you can get . . . plus a half-bottle of the best three-star Martell."

"You seem to know all about it! Did you make it?"

"No. But I bet I know who did. Only one woman in the country can make such cakes: and that's Mrs. Coles of Devondale!"

"You've guessed it in once!" said Fenn. "The kindest woman in Rhodesia."

"Ah!" sighed Dick. "She used to send *me* cakes once, when I was a lone bachelor, but she doesn't any more. I suppose she thinks Stella makes them for me now!" He grinned so pathetically at the humour of such a supposition that they all had to grin with him . . . except Stella, who scowled: but the scowl, like everything else she did that day, seemed (to Felicia) unreal, and as if to prove this she was laughing next moment over some story, she dropped her voice to relate to the three men about her. And since Fenn and Felicia were out of it, he reverted to the subject of shooting.

"You're quite right to be afraid of leopard. They are

cheeky brutes, and more treacherous to hunt than any animal I know. However, I don't suppose there's a hope of seeing our fellow in daylight, but we're sure, I think, to get a chance at the koodoo. They sometimes drink towards evening at a river pool we call the *iNconyane,* and that I intend to take you people to . . ." he stopped, seeing that she was not listening, but looking strangely across the stoep at something beyond the others, something that moved, for she followed it with a travelling glance, and her eyes were stricken. Startled, he looked, too, but could see nothing, and his glance returning to her face saw that the lovely colour she wore in her cheeks when she first entered had gone now, leaving her ivory-white.

"Is anything the matter?" he demanded in a low tone. She turned a haunted gaze on him and from her lips some words fell softly, almost soundlessly:

"Some one is . . . *going away* . . . soon!"

Afterwards he could be scarcely sure she had spoken, so faint and deathlike her voice, so dreamlike her gaze, fastened, it seemed, on some other dream. But presently she gave a sigh, and sat back on the settle like one whose shoulders have been relieved of a weight.

"You feel better?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes. It's gone!" she answered abruptly, and leaning her head against the wall, closed her eyes. Did she mean that her headache, or some sudden indisposition had gone? He neither knew nor had any idea of further questioning, but only felt a tremendous relief that the trouble had passed.

The others were rising now, and so did they. Fenn's dogs lying about the stoep, bestirred themselves and began to whine and prance with excitement at the sight of the guns. Stella came over, carrying hers—a beautifully finished, 8 m/m, sporting Mannlicher, with the carefulness of one thoroughly accustomed to the handling of firearms.

"That's a little gem," Felicia was striving hard to throw

off completely the strange absorption that had overtaken her. "Where did you buy it, Stella? I'd like one like it!"

"Paget Vyner gave it to me," said Stella laconically, and there was an instant's awkward silence, broken by Fenn with a generous word.

"He couldn't have given it into more expert hands! I'll never forget that regiment of bottles you polished off one afternoon at 200 yards . . . every neck shattered!"

"Yes. I've had plenty of practice on whisky bottles. They are targets we never lack at Manana." Dick's face behind her took on a dark flush, but she either didn't know, or care, that he was there, and continued to Fenn with a disdainful air: "Are we taking all those dogs with us?"

"Of course not. No dogs! If they get on the track of the koodoo there'll be no koodoo, and if they get on the track of the leopard there'll be no dogs." He signalled a boy hovering near the entrance. "*Bopa* the dogs, Mabunu!"

It was pathetic to see the crestfallen air that instantly fell upon every dog, and the battery of reproachful glances they turned on their master at the sound of the word *Bopa* (to tie up). Quite a good scuffle ensued, and as the party left the house a storm of melancholy howls arose from the back precincts.

Straggling down the Avenue, in single file, and all more or less preoccupied with their own thoughts, the party presently got beyond the homestead boundaries, and at a signal from Fenn, who led the way, struck off at right angles to a side gate that led into the veld. Sheer open veld it was, but with the bush carefully thinned out, and only the finest trees left—towering mopani, umkuna and mangwe—it had for several square miles the semblance of a beautifully-kept English park. Soon water began to be seen: smallish dams, with hidden springs in them; tree-shaded pools, some deep, some shallow, fed by rivulets that had flowed from the river in flood, and that even in the dry season trickled incessantly.

Clear water and fine grass! No wonder koodoo and the lesser buck were loath to bid farewell to such a spot.

Soon the wild things began to make their presence felt: a little group of duiker in the distance were intent on the ardours associated with the spring: a pair of ruddy little stem-bok stared for a moment with fascinated gaze, then bolted; a slender reitbok doe fled past like the wind, unaware that, at this season, she was safe as a hen in a barn-yard; half-a-dozen wild duck disporting themselves on some broad shallows were within good range, but for fear of scaring off the leopard (if he was about) or the bigger game, hoped for, no shot was fired. For the same reason hares were allowed to get away, much to the disgust of the native "beaters," to whose lot hares, being counted as "vermin," naturally fall. In the neighbourhood of the river, and as they drew nearer the famous *iNconyane,* a more profound silence fell upon the party. Indeed, in every serious hunting expedition, the hunters usually keep as quiet as possible, or if obliged to speak at all, do so in subdued tones. Even the forest seemed uncannily silent, except for the rustle of trees, the occasional coo of a dove and the distant ring of some native wood-cutter's axe.

Suddenly Stella, loitering last, and very much in the rear, gave a tiny cry of pain, that reached the man nearest her who happened to be Randal. Though some dozen paces ahead, he turned back at once to see what was wrong.

"My ankle!" she murmured, and as he came up he could see that she was pale, and had her teeth set into her lower lip.

"A sprain?" he enquired sympathetically enough, but reflecting inwardly, "What a curse women are on the veld! Always something!"

"No . . . I don't think so, just a rick, but . . ." she smiled ruefully, "enough to do me in, though, for the time being. I'll have to rest it a bit. Do you mind giving me your arm, and I'll hobble to that little kop and sit down."

She pointed ahead to a pile of rock and trees—a sort of small clumsy kopje round which the others, who had not looked back, were just disappearing.

"I know this place well, every inch of it, and the kop has a view right down to the *iNconyane*. Even if I'm out of the fun I can watch it going on."

He relieved her of her gun and she took his arm, limping along beside him, wincing a little but perfectly cheerful. He could not help admiring the good spirit of her. When they reached and came round the clump they saw that the others were some hundreds of yards ahead, debouching already in stalking fashion along the river bank.

"Just give me a hand up here," said Stella, and with his help she managed to scramble on to a large flat rock and seat herself. "Now be off and join them." But he hesitated, until she reiterated, rather impatiently that she'd be all right, and *wished* to be left alone. "I'm not a spoil-sport," she declared. "And don't let the others worry, either. Just say it's a little twist, and that I preferred to wait here . . . I never was keen on the old *iNconyane,* anyhow. Have waited there too often without getting a shot at anything." After that he made no more bones at leaving her, and having laid her gun beside her, made off at drill time to join the others. Once he looked back and saw her with her ankle up, massaging it.

The *iNconyane* Pool lay peaceful in the shallow bed of the river, at least the bed appeared shallow, but the centre of the pool must have been deep for it had never been known to dry up, even in the worst drought: a sedgy reed-fringed pool, the clear river sand about it deeply indentured with hoof marks of all kinds, while on the far bank, leading down to the water between great thorn trees, were many game tracks, those narrow unmistakable *sentiers* made by the slender, delicately-stepping feet of generations of buck. Nothing was in sight at the moment, but as Fenn had said, it was the koodoo drinking hour, and unless anything oc-

curred to startle them they might turn up at any moment. Randal related in a few words the mishap to Stella, and while there were expressions of sympathy no one took it very seriously. Things like that happen at every shoot, and "worse things at sea" as Castleton ungallantly remarked. Dick even went further, saying that he was always relieved when *any* woman dropped out of a gun party, then had to apologise to Felicia, amid general but very subdued giggles. At Fenn's direction they now took up positions in which to wait for the quarry, sitting deployed in a half-circle on the near bank, each hidden from the pool by natural cover, and at a distance of about 5 yards apart,—Dick and the Doctor in the front-line nearest the pool, with Felicia, Fenn and Castleton distributed to the rear. Naturally no one sat in anyone else's line of fire. Neither would Fenn have allowed a woman to sit behind anyone unless she was as skilful and careful with a gun as he believed Felicia to be. He himself was one of the best shots in the country; Randal, though careful, he knew to be an indifferent shot, therefore it was preferable to have him in front. Cardross tho' very reliable, had lately lost his distance sight, so he too had been given an orchestra stall nearest the river, while the three native boys lay flat on their stomachs in the grass, a little way behind Fenn: their work would come later when, and if, there was a kill.

Once comfortably in their places and concealed from anything approaching the far bank, absolute silence prevailed, even smoking being taboo, as the wind lay in a direction favourable to the game. In connection with this fact it suddenly occurred to Fenn to wonder if Stella would remember to refrain for once from her everlasting cigarette. If she didn't she might entirely ruin their luck, for even from the distance she had been left the scent of smoke would travel easily on the wind, and, detected by intending drinkers at the pool, frighten them off. With this thought in mind he laid down his gun and slinging round his field glasses,

turned them to where he calculated she would be sitting. It took a second or two to locate her, and just as he had succeeded in adjusting the lenses for a "close-up," an excited murmur came from Randal on the left front:

"*Now* we shan't be long!"

And the distant but sharp crack of a breaking twig indicated that *something,* if not actually the koodoo herd, was approaching the water-hole, though not yet near or clear enough to fire at: but Fenn, instead of turning to the pool and seizing his gun, remained transfixed, staring backwards at Stella. For she whom he had expected to see sitting moodily nursing her ankle, and probably smoking, was standing erect, gun at shoulder and apparently *sighting along the barrel in their direction!* Evidently her intention was to take a long try for the koodoo, and *more* than a long try, for, if he knew anything about it, the kopje was 300 yards off, and the distance to the opposite bank would bring it up to 350 yards at least. A limit shot! But surely for *that* her direction was too far right? Her direction? . . . Yes, by God! (his heart stood still as he realized it) Felicia Lissell sat in the direct line of fire! These conclusions racing through his brain with lightning speed and re-acting in turn upon his physical mechanism, speech leapt to take its part in the performance.

"Duck, Shonnie! . . . Duck your head!"

The order, not loud, but urgent and imperative, reached her brain instantly, and without a moment's hesitation she obeyed, dipping her head low. He saw *that,* even while with the clarity and scope of vision that comes in tense moments, he also saw and heard every one of several things that happened simultaneously: From the kopje Stella's gun had spoken, and from the orchestra-stall Dick's gun had spoken —*only those two shots rang out,*—followed by bedlam across the river, whence the koodoo herd stampeded in a frantic commotion of hurtling bodies and flying hooves—but he saw too that Dick Cardross in the act of firing had impulsively risen to his feet, and as suddenly pitched forward, and

now lay face down on the sloping bank. The next moment they were all scrambling towards him.

Felicia reached the spot first, then the others together, and between them they turned over Dick's heavy inert form, laying him on his back. He was breathing but unconscious, and on the front of his blue Fair-isle sweater a bright red stain showed, slowly spreading. Felicia gave one glance and turned away, but not to faint. While the men were investigating, and even as Randal uttered one ominous word: "intestinal" . . . a sharp sound of tearing linen came from behind them. Stripped of her long coat the girl was dividing it into bandages, and shortly she had two firm rolls to lay at the Doctor's hand. Turning to Fenn who supported Dick's head, while Castleton was busy staunching, and the Doctor searching his pockets for the little case he never moved without, she murmured rapidly:

"I'll take two boys and bring back that stretcher from the stoep . . . and there'll be things to order them to get ready."

He gave her a grateful nod, and with incredible swiftness she collected her assistants and sped up the slope. Randal spared a second, from some ghastly manipulation he had begun, to glance after her, surprised at her practicability, but otherwise grudging and morose.

"Dick was right," he muttered savagely. "Always some bloody accident with women at a shoot!"

Castleton considered this the infernal limit, and Fenn thought his own indignant thoughts, considering all that Felicia had done to help, but with poor Dick weltering there it was no time for argument.

"Is he done for, Tim?" he queried very low. Randal's glance met his for an instant across the prostrate form, and what Fenn read there made answer superfluous; but since in Dick's face there flickered symptoms of returning consciousness, a cheerful observation from the Doctor in his professional capacity seemed clearly indicated.

"He'll be all right, now we've got a bandage on him. What about your flask, Pat? Anything in it?"

"Rather!" Fenn produced and unscrewed the silver top that served as a container for a good tot of whisky, and at the sound Dick Cardross revived enough to whisper feebly but emphatically:

"Yes, for God's sake gimme a drink, old man."

"Right you are, Dick!"

"It must be a very young one, though," insisted Randal cheerfully, "No dissipation old man, till we get you safely tucked up at home."

Nevertheless the tot he held to Dick's lips was not so very young, and medically speaking it was wrong any way, but the Doctor knew what he knew. That first brief glance at the ragged gaping aperture and torn intestine had told him more than enough. It was the typical damage done by a soft-nosed bullet used for big game, and that which would kill koodoo must certainly kill Dick Cardross. With luck he might last the night out. With luck (plus the fortunate chance that Randal never went on holiday without drugs and instruments) he might even linger on through the next day but with that internal hemorrhage—hope might be said to be practically nil.

"I'm a gonner, I suppose," creaked Dick.

"Nonsense!" was the brisk retort. And at that juncture Stella came stumbling among them, white as death itself, horror stamped on every feature.

"Oh Dick! . . . oh *Dick!*" she tumbled on her knees beside him, weeping, distraught, full of tender pity, but full of shrinking too from the bloody mess revealed. He tried to speak, but the effort was too much, only a faint groan came from his lips, and he sank back into unconsciousness.

. . .

"Pull yourself together, Mrs. Cardross." Randal's order was harsh . . . "You can't do him any good in that state. Give her some whisky, Pat."

She put her hand over her mouth as if in an effort to push back the hysterical emotion that was shattering and tearing her whole frame with convulsive sobs, and after a few seconds, and aided by a mouthful of whisky she achieved a certain control of her shaking body, but her wide amber-coloured eyes set wider still in a sort of tragic astonishment she could not control, nor the trembling of her voice.

"How did it happen?" she stammered looking from Fenn to the others, and back again to Fenn who stared at her, too astonished for a moment to answer then:

"How did it happen?" he echoed. An indignant steely note rang in his voice, and it was unnecessarily loud at that, thought Randal.

"Shut up, Pat!" he said sharply. "He's coming round again." Dick opened his eyes, and a faint smile twisted his lips.

"I got the bull anyhow, whoever got me!" he murmured. It was true. They had had no time to notice it before, but there, across the river at the very lip of the pool, the body of a magnificent koodoo bull lay hunched as it had fallen when Dick's bullet brought it thundering down the bank. For a second the four of them stared in silence, then . . .

"Got the bull? By the Lord, you certainly did, Dick!" assented Fenn heartily.

"Yes, it's your trick all right, old man," said Randal, "but look here, you mustn't exert yourself talking. Just try and keep quiet until the boys come with the stretcher. Here they are, too. That girl made good going of it, by Jove!"

. . . . . .

Before the next dawn Dick Cardross had passed to his fathers. It was his *iDhlozi* Felicia had seen in the stoep!

CHAPTER VIII

Dick Cardross believed that the fatal shot had been fired by Felicia, and Felicia let him pass out of the world so believing.

A perhaps not unnatural conclusion for him to have come to, poor fellow, and even Randal, tho' regretfully enough, shared it with him, knowing no better, neither Fenn nor Castleton had the slightest doubt as to whose subtle mind had engendered and fostered the idea, but for the time being they could do nothing about it because of Felicia's resolute attitude. First she forbade, then pleaded with them, for Dick's sake!

"The truth would only cause him greater pain, and what does it matter about me? *You* know I didn't do it, and in any case it was obviously an accident." Of the truth of this last statement she felt certain. As far as Dick came into the matter, it *was* an accident, for the despatch of the little Mannlicher bullet had been on quite a different errand. Considering the disposition of the party on the river bank, and that Dick had been sitting low, it seemed practically impossible that he could have been seen from Stella's vantage point, and but for his impulsive rising, and Felicia's ducking, it would have been she, not he, who stopped the bullet. The girl knew this, and that Fenn must be aware that his shout had saved her life; but Dick's last hours did not seem to be the time to say anything about it. So, in the end, kneeling beside his bed to bid him farewell, she had let the dying man lay his hand consolingly on her bowed head, while he whispered comforting words . . . that she must not fret,

that it was all right, and the best thing that could have happened, anyway . . . "what with the booze and the rest of it!"

She guessed the meaning of *that,* too. With the philosophy and vision so often given to the dying Dick Cardross saw clearly how things must be if he lived—what with the strangle-hold drink had got on him, and the emptiness of that "shrine" at which he had so long worshipped:—wherefore, he was content to go. And Father Drago who had rushed over at once on getting the news, made the going easier. Dick not being a Catholic, nor in fact anything in particular as far as practising a religion went,—though he had worn the letters C. of E. on his wrist during the war,—no wonderful Latin ritual could be recited over him, nor the Last Sacrament according to the Catholic Church be administered. But he made his peace with God like a soldier, and was grateful to have one whom he loved as a man, and valued as a friend to usher him into eternity with valiant words, and prayers full of hope and trust in the compassion of His Maker. One beautiful passage spoken by the priest at the bedside, no one who heard could ever forget:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that on the last day I shall rise out of the earth and be encompassed again . . . I shall see God my Saviour with my eyes . . . *This my hope is laid up in my bosom.*"

. . . . . .

Dick was buried on the afternoon following the day of his death, and the next day, Christmas Eve, found the members of the house-party still at Poinsettia Pass, not because they wished it, for, spiritually and ethically, some at least among them felt very far apart, but because social exigency, as well as certain other reasons forced them to continue together for a while longer. Everywhere else it was merry-making time, for though Dick's death had cast a shadow across the Midlands, life and holidays had to go on as usual, but at the

Pass House at least, his friends might expect to be unintruded upon, hope for a little space of time to give to the memory of one who had just left them. Indeed it was difficult at first to realize that Dick was gone for good. The ring of his high-pitched voice, the red colour of his hearty face, the bulky amblings of his shapeless figure seemed lingering about the place still, and they felt that at any moment he might stroll into the room tumbler in hand, and on his lips and blithe enquiry: "What about a little spot?"

An element of pity for Stella, too, seemed first to enter into this matter of staying on. Her nervous condition was such as to make her unfit either for her own or anyone else's society, and Fenn could scarcely ask her to betake herself to Manana when, hysterically and with wild eyes she declared she could never again face a place that would be for ever haunted by Dick. If she had merely collapsed it might have made things simpler, for then she could have been run in to the local nursing home, or been given into the care of trained Miss Twilley. But white-lipped, strangely haggard for one of her type and colouring, the amber eyes full of despair, she yet seemed infused with a fierce restlessness that demanded company, movement, conversation, even drink:—on the night after the funeral, Felicia had seen her for the first time drink whisky-and-soda, not only as if she needed it but as if she liked it! Above all, she would not be left alone, but clung to the society of the others as a drowning person clings to a floating branch, or the arms of a more capable swimmer. And none of them, at first, possessed the requisite cold-bloodedness to cast off her detaining hands.

Felicia had indeed a further reason for pitying Dick's wife, and for feeling it her duty, spite of everything, to stand by. For, on the morning after the tragedy, legal papers had arrived from England bringing startling tidings. Dick it appeared had, after all, inherited only half of the Countess's fortune. And, with what seemed a strangely prophetic instinct, the old woman had executed a codicil to a recently

made will, to the effect that if he predeceased Felicia the whole of the estate must go to the latter. Thus the girl found herself heiress to ninety thousand pounds, and the fact filled her with bewilderment, for she could not understand why and when the Countess had departed from her plan of many years' standing to leave everything to Dick! In an uneasy frame of mind she broached the matter to Father Drago, as they drove back together in his little runabout, after leaving poor Dick in the Dorp Cemetery, and she had come to the right man for enlightenment, for the priest knew all about it. Unable to speak before, as the matter was confidential, he now told her that both the changed will and codicil had been made and signed at his Mission House on that Monday at the beginning of the Countess's fatal illness. The priest himself, with Pagg, witnessed the document, and later he had dispatched it to England. The packet could only have arrived about three weeks after the old lady's death, up to which time the solicitors would naturally suppose that the former will executed by them, and in their keeping, held good.

"She did not make the change in any spirit of malice or unkindness," explained Father Drago. "You will realize that when you see the actual documents. She loved Dick, and wished to benefit him, but she had a curious conviction that inheriting so large a sum would bring him more harm than good. She had, moreover, a great opinion of your wisdom and generosity, and felt that you could be trusted to do the right thing. Her chief anxiety, however,—in case of Dick's early death which she thought quite probable on account of his drinking habits—was that Mrs. Cardross should not have the handling of the money."

"How thankful I am that Dick never knew!" said the girl fervently "I should have hated him to look upon me as a usurper of even half his heritage! It seems a special dispensation of Providence that this letter did not arrive earlier."

"It couldn't have. They evidently wrote by return on

receiving the new will, but, as it happened, I lost the mail the week I despatched it. They might of course have cabled you, but having already cabled Dick to the effect that they held the will by which he benefited, I imagine they considered the changed conditions required something fuller than a second cable to explain away the first. Probably they have written Dick by this mail, too."

"And Stella will get the letter . . . and hate me worse than ever," she thought, adding grimly to herself: "Perhaps she will try and drown me this time, poison and shooting both having failed!" But aloud she said firmly: "Of course I shall share Cousin Letty's fortune with Stella."

"I'm afraid not," answered the priest. "You will find very stringent conditions attached in that connection."

"And if I refuse it unless I am allowed to share?"

"Then it all goes to a Mission in West Central Africa for converting dear little cannibals into dear little Catholics," was the dry response.

Thus was a further disquieting problem added to the startling incidents and conclusions crowded upon Felicia during the past few days. Fortunately she had acquired a certain basic sense of peace and security that sat fast in her heart, and, spite of sorrow and horror, sang to her sometimes, even as the *ikwezi* continued to sing from its tree.

A last and least pleasant reason of all, if that were possible, for staying on, was that the Police though they had come out at once after the shooting, and visited the scene of the tragedy, having not yet finished their enquiries had intimated that it would be more convenient to do so before the party dispersed. The preliminary inquest before the burial, held hurriedly as such things are in such climates, but officially complete as far as it went, had ended with a finding by doctors and coroner of "Death as the result of accidental shooting." It had not been the first nor would it be the last affair of the kind to happen in Rhodesia, and the attitude of those in charge of the enquiry was, that it was no use dwell-

ing on harrowing details for the benefit of the newspapers, especially upon the conclusion gathered (by a series of inferences rather than from any direct statement) that one of the women present at the shoot was responsible for the disaster. Bad enough for her already, was the opinion, without "putting her through it" all over again, and for this reason neither Stella nor Felicia were called to give evidence. It sufficed for general purposes to hear witnesses to the fact that Cardross had received in the back a shot that effectually did his business for him, penetrating the lung and glancing down and out through the intestines by one of those nasty apertures peculiar to expanding bullets; that Fenn was using his field glasses at the time with his gun on the ground, while neither Castleton nor Randal had fired a shot. Surely enough said! Poor Dick Cardross had gone west, and nothing could bring him back. Bad luck for him, but rotten, too, for the one who had done it, and the less said the better. Someone had bungled as usual, was the general conclusion, and perhaps some of them mentally echoed Dick's own remark: "Always *some*thing with women at a shoot!" but their first instinct as friends of Dick, was to sympathise with Dick's womenfolk. Poor little Mrs. Dick was very cut up, too, that was clear, and though no-one particularly liked her, everyone felt naturally sorry for her. The bullet, by-the-way, had not been recovered, spite of a keen search conducted by the police. Mrs. Cardross's gun was also missing, and she had declared her belief to the Police that someone had stolen it from the kopje where she left it lying.

Of course Fenn and Castleton were not only concerned as to the exoneration of Felicia, but fully resolved that this should be done. But for one thing, the ban she had laid on their lips had not been lifted before the inquest, for another, it is not exactly pleasant to get up and point the finger of murder at a wife, especially when no questions are being asked and the particular point is being carefully evaded. Besides,

as Fenn very well knew, the truth was bound to emerge during the course of the further enquiries by the Police.

And out the Police came, first thing on the morning after the funeral, for, Christmas Eve or not, they had their job to do. There were three of them: an Inspector who resembled a pleasant greyhound, and two Non-coms who looked like extremely intelligent airedales. They stayed about the place all day, quite polite and friendly but systematically taking each person apart and questioning them piercingly on the simplest acts and incidents of the day of the tragedy. Not only that, but when not questioning they were rummaging the house, poking and prying into every corner, even the ladies' bedrooms, much to the discomfort of Stella and Felicia, neither of whom had had the time or inclination to leave their temporary abodes in such state of tidiness as they would have expected of a maid. However they had to make the best of it and sit in the stoep pretending they didn't mind. In fact the stoep was the refuge of them all at such times as they were not being put to the torture. Somehow it seemed all very queer and sinister. Not one of the house-party had ever spent a more miserable Christmas Eve.

From a significant gleam in Stella's glance, when it rested upon her at luncheon Felicia felt certain that the Solicitors' letter from England had been read during the morning, and that the fact of the Countess's changed will was no longer a secret from Dick's widow. The fresh spurt of hatred this knowledge would engender, gave food for depressing thought, and but for the basic peace in her soul, the song of her heart that would not be silenced, the girl scarcely knew how she could have got through the dreary day.

Sitting in the stoep they smoked endless cigarettes trying to talk about such impersonal things as books, golf, motoring in the Lake district, mountaineering and Winter Sports: anything that had no earthly relation to shooting in Rhodesia! But spite of the outward calm they strove to maintain, all were thoroughly on edge. It was impossible not to realize

that the police for some cause or another were being very odd. Fenn thought it invidious and disgusting that instead of the local Inspector whom they all knew, being sent out, a stranger had come from Headquarters to conduct the affair, and on his remarking this to Randal the latter indignantly agreed that it looked deuced queer; but after a long private interview with the officer in question the doctor seemed to have changed his politics, and thereafter sat apart, glum as a moulting thrush.

Among other unexpected happenings, Yank Breddon had turned up at the house, his first appearance since leaving it the day before the tragedy, though at the funeral he had been a prominent and a strangely correct figure, his hairy bosom hidden for once beneath a fastened-up shirt and tie; his trousers, the same old embroidered ones, but accompanied by a black coat, obviously borrowed and hanging from his spare frame with the amplitude of a toga. His long-visioned eyes wore a strained, red-rimmed look, almost giving the impression that he had been crying. It was well known indeed that he had a great affection for Dick, and it surprised no-one to see him, just before the coffin was lowered, edge up and lay some small tribute beside the widow's beautiful wreath. It looked like a scrap of paper that he shoved so hurriedly among the roses, but Yank being a queer card was allowed to do queer things. Besides, everyone was emotionally overwrought, as Stella who had insisted on coming, chose that moment to break down and weep inconsolably.

It was at luncheon that Yank reappeared, but rather disconcertingly declined to sit down with the rest of them, among whom were of course, the policemen, and instead, grabbed up some bread and cheese from the sideboard and retired to the back verandah.

"Poor Yank's not feeling so good this mornnig." Fenn had apologised smilingly using the old man's own idioms. "His constitootion is a little in arrears."

Be that as it might, in the back verandah Yank remained for the rest of the afternoon, staring out at the veld in a moony trance.

At six o'clock before the day's long weariness showed signs of ending with the Inspector's announcement, that it was about time he returned to the Dorp and got busy on his Report, and at once everyone, heaving sighs of relief followed Fenn to the dining-room for the ritual of sundown. The parting guests, however much unloved and unwelcome must be sped with drinks . . . to say nothing of the spirituous needs of the jaded hearts left behind! But even that healing moment was shattered by the news that the unwelcome band would be out again first thing in the morning.

"I shall then," said Inspector Brooke in laconic farewell, "with a view to correcting discrepancies, read you my report made up on your separate accounts. And I may mention that there are considerable discrepancies. But no doubt that is a matter to be gone into elsewhere." They sat staring gloomily at each other until the last hoof-beats of police horses died away. Castleton was the first to recover. "What's he mean by that?"

"There's one thing we'd better get clear at once," Fenn answered looking stonily at Stella, "It's *got* to come out who shot Dick." (It *had* come out as far as Fenn himself was concerned, and very emphatically.)

"Of course," agreed Stella instantly, and in turn looked stonily at Felicia. "No one is going to blame you, Shonnie, for what no doubt can be affirmed was pure accident—" she paused, and the silence that momentarily fell, might truly have been described as bristling, so alive and hostile was it with the anger of Fenn, the loathing indignation of Castleton, and the contempt of the girl addressed,—but before any of them found their breath she finished softly: "And no matter what I may *think*—Dick forgave you, therefore, I must."

Felicia did not speak, she merely made a gesture as of brushing something away from her . . . in fact the contamination of lies.

"You surely don't suppose you're going to get away with *that?*" exclaimed Fenn roughly, and Castleton went off like an explosive: "My God, if ever anyone heard such barefaced . . ." but Stella interrupted them simply:

"Of course I knew you would both want to protect her . . . no matter at whose expense! But whatever you said to the Inspector he got the truth from me at any rate."

"The truth is not in you, if you try to pin the killing of Dick to Miss Lissell. It was one thing to let the poor fellow pass out unaware of the real facts, but it's quite another to let you continue pitching such a tale." Fenn spoke quietly, having regained his composure at once. No use anyone without complete control of himself expecting to match wits with that cold-souled witch! "You know as well as I do who did it. I was watching you through the glasses, and saw you take aim and fire."

"I am sorry, Pat, but you are lying to protect Miss Lissell, as I knew you would." Fenn being unaccustomed to hearing this accomplishment attributed to himself, turned livid, while she continued rapidly, "But it is only your word against mine, and though I expect you will back up your story by producing her unfired gun, everyone will know how easily *that* could be managed."

"He doesn't need backing up." Castleton also had become very composed. Stella's icy malevolence had that effect. She seemed to have brought her capacity for deadly long-shooting into that pleasant room where until two days ago they had all been merry together. The only way to cope with it was to be as cool and wary as herself. "If he did . . . I can prove hearing him shout 'duck!' to Shonnie, and seeing her drop like a stone to escape your shot."

Stella smiled at him: "Just the sort of thing I warned Inspector Brooke you *would* say. 'Both being in love with the

girl they will lie their souls away in her defence' I told him. Very chivalrous no doubt, but I have myself to consider, and not to oblige anybody am I going to have it said that I mishandled a gun to the extent of shooting my own husband."

"That is what it amounts to, however," said Fenn coldly, "though as to mishandling . . ." she turned on him like a viper:

"I wouldn't have harmed Dick for the world! What do I gain by his loss?—the only man among you, as I know, to my cost! It is that girl there," gesturing at Felicia, "who stands to benefit, though she shan't do it while I have breath left in my body. Even with you and Castleton backing her she's got to discount the fact that by Dick's death she gains ninety thousand pounds!"

A breathless petrifaction filled the room, not only at the tidings contained in her words, but at the horrid import they carried. Every brain leaped at once to the hateful element that must be introduced by such a fact, if, in the rôle of bereaved wife, Stella persisted in her charge. False as it was, there would be no counter action of that charge, save from Fenn and Castleton whose evidence might easily, as she divined, be labelled biassed, or, at best—considering the natural confusion at the scene of the tragedy—mistaken! Sensing the stupefaction and general *malaise* she had wrought among them she stood faintly smiling.

"*That's* not a motive, I suppose?" she mocked, and the query still lingered on her lips as Yank Breddon walked into the room from where he had brooded all the afternoon, and silently pointed a long forefinger at her. It might have been Death Itself standing there, tall, gaunt, emaciated, with such a threat in the strange light eyes, that even before he spoke, she who had been so mockingly intrepid shrank away, paling under his gaze.

"You lying woman . . . O, you lying woman!" his tone, almost gentle, vibrated with menacing reproach. Opening out the palm of his pointing hand he exposed a small

leaden object, ugly and jagged in shape. "Look at the bullet you put into poor Dick's back!" he pushed it close under her face, and she backed to the wall, blanching, "I got your gun, too. It wasn't stolen. Oh no! *I* got it."

"I seen her!" He turned to the others again resuming the cold narrative style of speaking natural to him, and that somehow made his indictment the more relentless. "I was stalking that thyar leopard, and had taken up a position in a tree way across the river . . . not *opposite* you people, but by that bend that brings it in close to the kopje where *she* was sitting . . . and I seen the hull thing. I seen her take aim for a long shot before the buck was ever in sight. I couldn't make out what she was up to, and before I knew, the thing was done." He looked at Stella with his terrible eyes, and she sank onto a chair, as if her legs would no longer bear her. Not for nothing had she instinctively detested this old man!

"I don't say she meant it for Dick, mind," he pursued with sombre intentness. "The girl was betwixt her and Dick, and she was aiming as straight for the girl, as I am at you," he demonstrated with his finger at Fenn. "But the girl dipped, and Dick got it! . . ." he passed his hand over his eyes, for an instant. "By the time I was down from my tree and across the stream, she was thyar on the bank with all of yous, so I went by and collected her gun . . . and I spent all night collecting her bullet . . . then I wrote it up in my diary. I didn't come anigh Dick for fear I should spoil his dying with the truth. And I didn't mean to tell on her. She was his wife and he loved her. I tore the leaf out of my diary and put it with him in the grave. But *now*" . . . he turned once more to Stella, "now that you want to lay it to this poor girl, I've give evidence agin you . . . and I'll give it agin in the Courts of Law, you lying jade, you!"

"That'll do, Yank," said Fenn. "You've said enough." Linking his arm in the old man's he gently drew him from the room. Stella had collapsed, with head against the wall,

and Randal quickly got brandy from the sideboard for her, while Felicia and Castleton slipped away in different directions.

. . . . . .

There was no question of sitting down to dinner that evening. Both Stella and Felicia remained in their rooms, and the men made a sort of picnic meal out at the tents, where the whole position was re-discussed between them, and a final decision made that to save further scenes, Yank must go into town at once and give his evidence to the police. It was of course unthinkable that any proceedings would be taken against Stella. The thing had been an accident as far as Dick came into the matter, and accident it would remain. Yank had cauterised at its very root the base intention to incriminate Felicia, and certainly the fact that she was innocent had got to be made public: that was a stern duty they allowed her: but to pursue vengeance further, no one would desire to do. Of that they all felt certain, and said so except Randal, who once more relapsed so noticeably into his glum silence that when they were alone for a moment Fenn enquired about it.

"Is anything the matter, Tim? . . . apart I mean from all this horrible business of Dick's death?"

"Yes: there is. That confounded Inspector gave me the shock of my life this morning. But I can't tell you old man. He swore me to secrecy."

"Oh Lord!" groaned Fenn. "There's no end to it!"

While the others drove into the Dorp. Randal was to take the remaining car and fetch Pagg and Nurse Twilley from Manana. The services of the latter Stella would doubtless require on the morrow; and Pagg was for Felicia's benefit.

"I don't want Miss Lissell left alone until she is quit of this country," said Fenn, and none asked him why. They fully understood, that it would be safer to leave a canary

with a cat, or a mamba in a chicken-coop than Felicia to the tender mercies of Stella Cardross.

Fenn did not go to the Dorp himself. True, someone had to drive Yank in, but Castleton was so obviously bursting to get away for a bit from a house where the very air still quivered with echoes of the recent "scene," that it would have been a shame to detain him. He, and the old lion-man whizzed off like two reprieved murderers, and Fenn could imagine, once the unpleasant business at Police quarters was over, with what bliss they would settle down to drinks and relaxation in the womanless Eden of the Club. For himself he already felt uneasy at having Felicia so long out of his sight, and the moment the others were well away he sat down and wrote a note asking her to come out to the garden as there were one or two important matters he would like to discuss with her.

Waiting, restlessly he walked up and down the beginnings of a lawn, some distance from the house, and breathed a sigh of relief when at last he saw the light in her room go out, and presently, her slight dark figure coming towards him through the dewy dimness of the garden. It was still early, not more than nine o'clock, and in the vaporous purple sky above, jewels were studded thick, scattering a soft luminescence. Amid them, the new moon, a slender half-circle of pearl, lingered wistfully to shed a last pale ray of grace.

Felicia approached him slowly, the black gown she wore, making her scarcely distinguishable in the darkness from the young trees that grew all about her path. Strangely enough he had always thought of her in terms and images of trees. Sometimes she seemed to him like a young slim larch, very proud and alone, decked in the fairy green of spring. Other times, particularly when she wore white, she resembled a slender virginal little broom, all out in bridal array. He remembered how that first night he had seen her, the lines of an exile recalling the "blossoming winter-plum"

had sprung to his memory. And now, as she came near, the grave narrow beauty of her face, dawning from the darkness, the gleam of her arms through filmy lace, her throat like a column of moonlight, he thought of a song he had heard one long midnight ago in a port of Spain: a throbbing, torrid, tender song, intertwined with the heart-break of music.

"A Spanish madrigal!" he said to himself. "She is like a Spanish madrigal . . . sung by a lover!" And his own heart was suddenly seared with the anguish of unattainable desire, so sweet she was, so white and proud, and full of an exquisite wizardry . . . and so out of reach!

"I thought we'd better have a talk," he said quietly. "To-morrow will see the end of this horrible business, I hope, and after that . . . you will be going . . . soon."

She did not answer this. Only stood there, very still, faintly perfuming the night with wood-violets or some such clean elusive fragrance, suggestive of secluded woodlands, and bringing back to him his boyhood, though God knew he had seen more of English slums than English woods! Still, he had his memories: even the wretchedest of street gamins get sometimes, by grace of charity, a day in the country! But bitterness for that remembered charity rather than gratitude overwhelmed him in this hour, and tinged his voice as he repeated, sombrely:

"You will be going soon . . . back to England," and with each word he seemed to strike a blow on an inward wound that was already bleeding him white.

"I don't know . . ."

What did she mean by that? And by the soft mysteriousness of her voice? That voice which even when used for flinging out her little witty mockeries, had always the same effect on him—as if she thrust her fingers inside his breast and folded them about his naked heart. Her voice . . . and that walk of hers, that the natives said was like a river flowing after rain! God! that a woman should have such

allure to her . . . and withal be so sweet, and clean, and sound! . . . all the things a man dreamed and desired! Wine and lilies!

What a fool he had been to ask her to come out here, just to make him burn and bleed afresh, as he had burnt and bled in the silences of every night since first he saw her face! Yet, as the price of her presence he would lie on the rack itself! He knew that. And it would be worse than the rack when she was gone . . . back to England . . . out of his life for ever!

"Shall we sit down somewhere," he said steadily, "while we talk things over? Or would you prefer to walk?"

"Let us walk a little," she answered. So side by side they wandered on and about the garden, while he told her what the other men had gone into town to do, and how it was quite certain that not a breath of blame or scandal would touch her name. Told her too of Randal's errand to Manana to fetch the nurse and the maid.

"I couldn't think of your being alone here with Stella . . . after all that has passed. And I want you to promise to lock yourself in to-night. It sounds silly, but better be safe than sorry as the old tag runs. Some of us will sleep indoors too, and with Pagg in the room next to you I think you'll be all right. . . ."

"Of course," she said. "And spite of everything I could never be really afraid or unhappy in this darling place."

He was warmed all through by the spontaneous generosity of her words. Surprised too. He had not realized that she liked Poinsettia Pass so much, and said so.

"I think it is the loveliest home in Rhodesia. Even the tragedy of Dick's passing cannot darken it for long, nor the hideousness of this afternoon's scene. With its bird-life, its trees and flowers and wild things all about, it has a natural resilient existence of its own, independent of what mere human beings may do in it, or to it."

"I'm awfully bucked to hear you say that, because I felt

it, too, when I first saw the place. At once it became my idea to buy and build, and eventually to live here, with books, and dogs, and beasts away from . . . everything."

"What do you mean by . . . *everything?*" He felt her eyes gravely intent upon him.

"The sickening world of false values and rotten standards: the snobbery and savagery. Even from such bigger things as life can offer of ambitions and rewards, I want to get away. Perhaps," he added moodily, "because they are barred me."

"Nothing is barred to you," she said gently. "Everything is in the reach of a man with brains and a resolute will."

"You're mistaken I think . . . but even if it were so. . . ." Well, he left it at that. Not to her of all women would he open up the festering sore of his unknown birth and origin. Doubtless she knew it already; she *must* know; Rhodesia would not have left her in ignorance; indeed he himself had brandished it. But to show her the running sore, invite her to look into it? No.

"You surely could not really *think* of 'sitting down' to life, here?" she pursued—"lying down to it would be the right phrase."

He made some sound that might have been a laugh or a groan. She continued steadily:

"To make it your home, I can understand. A place of rest and refreshment to come back to from the tumult, yes! But to bury yourself with dogs and books? *You,* a man of action, one who has ranged the seas and fought in historic battles! Never! I should despise you if I thought you could be content with such an existence!"

"I don't think I said anything about contentment!"

"You cannot do it," she urged in a voice that was steel swathed in velvet. "And you will not. You must go back into the scrum where you belong, to wrestle and wrench from it the things you only think barred to you. You must show the world that a man who has inherited no name, is

the freer to make a great one for himself, one that will be the world's envy. Here, in Rhodesian political life, is your opportunity. Oh! If I were a man in your position, how I would delight to do it!"

He could not but smile at her ardour, as well as the thought of her being a man. Her heart was valiant enough—but all that perfume and loveliness lost!

"You only think so," he returned sombrely. "If you really *were* you'd know that it is never for himself that a man wants the glories of success . . . but to lay at the feet of a woman . . . *the* woman!"

"Well . . . *get* your woman," she said softly, strongly, and her voice now was a thrush's that breaks in the middle of its golden song. Then silence fell between them. Even as all about them, nature lay quiet, yet stirring and throbbing with the forces of life, so for a little space those two were silent, while in heart and pulse the little drums of life were beating loud; and mind, spirit and body were alive with unspoken, unknown, unborn potentialities. At last he spoke, not trusting himself to look at her, but staring straight into the veld; making his declaration once and for all to the country he had adopted and the woman who was not for him. He had not meant to do it, but it was wrung from him.

"There are no women in the world for me since I first saw your face . . . Appassionata! I can never unrivet you from my soul, to make place for another."

"And you never must." Her voice low and golden at his elbow made him tremble all through like a tree under summer lightning, but he did not turn. He thought he must be mad, or she mocking him. Then she touched him, laying her hand on his arm: "You are in my soul, too, Pat. You invade my very life!"

When she said his name then he knew that it was true, just as the sound of hers upon his lips, had seemed to turn her body into a cup to hold the precious wine of life, and

given her power to speak her own love without further ado. But still he held aloof from the generosity of her, from the spell of her voice and words. He was a man of principle, if not of pedigree, and had fought out with himself long ago this question of ever being given to by a loved woman to whom he had nothing to give in return of those worldly things which women value.

"No . . . I can't," he muttered, stammering. "Don't tempt me. I won't. It is not fair."

"It *is* fair, Pat." No stammering from her, but strong, clear affirmative: "It's either *you or no one* for me, in the whole world."

"I have nothing to give you, Shonnie . . . no name for you, and the proud, beautiful children that should be yours."

"It is *you* they will be proud of," she whispered. "Between us, we will make a name for them that will ring through the world."

He would not have been human if he could have resisted further, with that armful of delicate loveliness holding herself to his heart and to his lips: if he had not found himself drinking long and thirstily from that cup of precious wine! She felt again the thrilling wonder she had known when he had held her in the dance, the flow and fuse of his vitality with hers, while he murmured his secret images of her into her hair:

"You are like a little virgin tree, my Shonnie . . . a young slim larch, or one of those slender brooms all out in bridal array. Your blackbird's wing hair only makes you whiter . . . It's no use saying these things don't count in a man's passion for a woman. Yet I love you for a hundred other things and qualities not seen with the eye!"

"Oh, Pat . . . I knew you loved me that day when I was going away to Salisbury, and you looked at me from your car . . ."

"You were lovely in your white . . . I felt sick with envy of Dick sitting close enough to touch even your gown . . ."

"And I of the red rose you had in your shirt . . ."

"Blood of my heart! . . . I have inherited the earth . . . I who was a beggar!"

"Don't, Pat . . . it hurts!"

"*Can* it be true?" He held her apart, gazing at her with passion darkened eyes. "Did you know on Friday? . . . that first day you came to my house . . . that while we talked of Rhodes and Union in the doorway, I was taking you into my arms with my eyes . . . kissing your beloved lids?"

"Yes . . . I *knew,* and I have been happy ever since . . . all this misery and agony, all the lies . . . haven't really touched me because of that . . . I knew that all was well between thee and me, and it gave me an exquisite peace I have never before felt in my life."

"Shonnie . . . " How lovers love lingering on each other's names! As though giving themselves a precious gift every time the adored word shapes itself between the lips! "There are such lots of things to tell you, and," he hesitated miserably, "and some things I can never explain, and you must not ask about, beloved." She knew at once what he meant. Stella! . . . but, thank God, he was wrong, there: *that* skeleton need never clank between them its hidden bones!

"I know more than you think, Pat. I must tell you now that I was in the summer house on Saturday night . . ." aghast, he almost loosed his hold of her, but she stayed close as a homing dove, and went on swiftly: "I had gone there to fetch my slipper from the secret drawer of your desk."

"Good God! you knew about that, too!"

More explanations then, another chapter to be opened, with reticence on the part of the man, glanced at with

lenient understanding by the woman, before it was finally laid aside. Better to clean the slate with tears than put it away dirty. It must be remembered, too, that Felicia was of the moderns: one of those who even when of tender age, without endangering her pristine innocence, "knew prac'lically ev'thing." While Fenn, though he had tripped badly over the lowness of another's standards, had not stepped down from his own. There were further important matters:

"You'll have to become a Catholic, of course." He spoke with the tender arrogance of one who, as he had said, from owning nothing now possessed the earth.

"I am nearly one already, Pat. Father Drago has taught me how to pray, and my visions of the other world are almost banished. It was only very faintly that I saw poor Dick's *iDhlozi* the other day."

This he naturally did not understand, and the story of *iDhlozis* had to be unfolded. So the enchanted hour passed, and lost in each other they wandered in those secret Elysian glades known only to lovers. Until, suddenly, a shrill, clear call broke through the lovely mists, violently dispelling them.

"Coo—ee!" It came again, high and clear. They knew it was no use ignoring Stella's favourite mode of attracting attention. If they did she would only come and find them. There she was, pacing impatiently up and down before the stoep, clad in cloak and scarf as if for a journey. But they let her whistle a good while, before regretfully at last they wound their way towards the house. What could the woman want?

"Where have you been? . . . where has everybody got to?" was her stormy greeting. "I've been calling for ages!" then, addressing herself directly to Fenn: "I want to be taken over to Tagati at once, please." He expostulated.

"At this hour! I don't see how it can be managed. Both the cars are away" . . .

"It's of the utmost importance. Where *are* the cars?"

"One's gone to the Dorp, the other Randal's using to fetch Miss Twilley and Pagg in."

"Why drag those two awful females here?"

This was difficult to explain, but he did his best.

"For one thing we thought the nurse might be useful to you . . ."

"Ridiculous!" she snapped, then turned abruptly from the subject. "Anyway I *must* go to Tagati. I haven't slept for three nights, and now I find my sleeping *cachets* gone . . . those beastly Policemen! . . . the impertinence of them taking bottles out of my room. Did they, out of *yours?"* she demanded of Felicia.

"I haven't looked," was the surprised answer, "and really I don't think I've got any bottles to speak of."

"My *cachets* have gone," she repeated querulously, ". . . and . . . and Padge is the only person in the country who uses the same stuff as I do. I *must* get some of his. I'll go mad if I don't sleep to-night!" She stared at them with angry, hopeless eyes, and seemed suddenly arrested by the calm serenity of them: "But . . . what do *you* care, you two?" She turned away with a half sob.

"Of course we are sorry, Stella," said Felicia gently, "and perhaps when the Doctor gets back he can prescribe a draught."

"It's no use asking *him* for draughts," opposed Stella fiercely. "I tell you there's only one drug that does me any good . . . and *he* hasn't got it, that's certain."

"You never know . . ." but at this juncture Randal drove up with his ruffled-looking cargo of "awful females," which silently began to discharge itself, while Fenn expounded the situation, 'mid stormy interruptions, from Stella. When Randal said that he could undoubtedly find something to make her sleep she became almost frantic.

"You *can't,* I tell you. Besides, there is something else . . . I *must* see Padge to-night, and you must drive me over, Pat."

"I'm sorry, Stella," he said firmly, "but under no circumstances can I go to Tagati. I think you know that, and why." She turned to Randal.

"Then, Doctor, you must take me! . . . *please.* I can't see at night, or I'd drive myself . . ."

The Doctor, trying to hide his moody features from the searching rays of the car-lamps, did not appear to take agreeably to the idea, and looking at his watch, he too mentioned the lateness of the hour.

"We can be there and back in less than an hour," she pleaded. "It *is* inconsiderate of me, I know, but I simply must see Padge to-night. It may even be a matter of life and death." This might have sounded ridiculous but for her wild eyes and tragic mien, and as the doctor still hung back she cried desperately:

"If you won't I must simply walk it, that's all!"

After that, of course, there was no more to be said, and Randal sulkily prepared to do her bidding. To Pagg and Twilley, still scrabbling with their packages, he gave a brief injunction as he got back into the car:

"Remember what I told you."

"Yes, sir,"
"Yes, doctor," } they meekly replied.

He drove off with Stella. The nurse and domestic, repaired indoors, and Felicia might possibly have followed if Fenn had not detained her. He did not have to plead very hard either, for after all it was not very late, . . . since others had to be abroad . . . why should not they wait in the garden till those others returned? Their desire to extend the enchanted hour a little longer was natural enough. Once more the dimness of the garden enfolded them, the secret glades opened to their eager feet, and it seemed more like a few minutes than an hour, when Randall and his passenger were back again. Then at last Felicia slipped away. Entering by her private door, she found that Pagg (the perfect servant, whatever her private idiosyncrasies!) had given

the room an air of civilised neatness it had sadly lacked during the last few days.

As for the men, once Stella had left them, they seemed suddenly to forget the lateness of the hour. Stealthily Fenn burgled his own dining room and taking out whisky and glasses, they sneaked across to the summer house, where they could feel pretty certain of being able to talk unheard. Briefly Randal related the history of the past hour.

"Vyner was not there . . . Gone to spend Christmas with the de Wilton's, and Bristowe, by-the-way—that little Sinn-Fein fellow—seemed to think it a clear case between Vyner and Miss Hibiscus. He told me so when we were alone. But that came later. At first, Mrs. Cardross insisted on going indoors, where Bristowe was amusing himself with the newspapers. She fidgeted about, even going into Vyner's bedroom and rummaging around. Then, having ascertained that Campbell, the other fellow in charge, was over at the Mine-house, she insisted on going there. Bristowe remained with me . . . an entertaining enough merchant, I must say, even if you don't care for his politics . . . and after a while Campbell came across for stationery . . . said Mrs. Cardross had decided to write a letter to Vyner, to be sent off first thing in the morning. We found the stationery, and then as Campbell appeared to me more than slightly 'oiled' I went back with him. Before we reached the Mine-house I had a glimpse of our little lady busy at a cupboard in the corner, and she must have been pretty nippy to have got back to the table and be meditatively seated when we went in! However, she wrote her letter and left it with Campbell, but strangely enough, I heard no more about sleeping draughts. Perhaps she found *cachets* in his bedroom . . . in which case, what was she looking for in the Mine's office cupboard?"

"Haven't the foggiest," Fenn's reply was given with detachment, for when a man has been walking in Paradise

with an angel, it is difficult for him to take much interest in the doings of a mere woman he dislikes.

"Very mysterious, anyway," said Randal. "But not so mysterious as what I am about to tell you," and the significance of his utterance at last aroused the other's attention. "While Cardross has been dying here, the Police, in possession of Manana, have been investigating the death of Countess Karamine."

"But . . . what on earth?"

"You may well ask, my son. And when I tell you further that the autopsy aroused a suspicion which the analysis confirmed, that the old lady had undoubtedly died of poison . . ."

"Good Lord!"

"Yes, a virulent vegetable, or rather, *insect,* poison, administered in liquid. In fact we have little doubt that she got the first dose that Sunday morning when she had tea in the verandah with her hostess, before driving over to the Mission. That dose in all probability would have cooked the poor soul's goose for her, for though slow, it's very fatal stuff: but to make certain, two or three more doses were administered, in tea, and broth, during the following week . . . *and we know who did it* . . ." Fenn did not press that! That horrible truth was already piercing its way into his brain.

"I never heard of anything so ghastly . . ."

"The evidence is pretty damning. A number of native boys have come forward; one, Malash, who relates having described to his mistress the deadly qualities of the insect in question—*isiBunu* they call it—and collecting a specimen for her. One, Jim, who swears that his mistress "tried" it first on Miss Lissell, in a pot of tea, but that the girl escaped by making a fresh pot. One, Fritty, who (later on) was commissioned by his mistress to find more *isiBunu* at the price of sixpence apiece, and collected and delivered three to her. One, Marli, who, having assimilated all aforesaid informa-

tion from his 'bruddas,' took it upon himself to do a bit of spying, and can affirm that his mistress boiled the insects in question in her room, bottled the liquid, and put doses of it *twice* in the Countess's tea-pot, and *once* in her beef tea . . ."

"Tim . . . it's too horrible!" Fenn looked like a man who might be ill any moment.

"Wait a second . . . you know what natives are: they had even collected and hidden the odd bits of stick with which the little poisonous beast does itself up . . . and which they allege the lady threw away to be burnt in the Dutch oven that heats the bath water . . ."

"Still," objected Fenn, sick to death, but revolting at the thought of this native spying business. "Surely, the evidence of a lot of niggers against a white woman . . . !"

"The nurse and maid have made statements, too . . . there was a day when Twilley found her with the soup . . . and Pagg swears she once caught her with the lid off the tea-pot, and a small bottle in her other hand . . . the maid took an opportunity of throwing out the contents of the pot, but she did not throw the incident out of her mind. It appears, too, that the Countess suspected what was happening and warned her maid."

"It seems incredible," muttered Fenn; but he knew that it was not incredible. A woman capable of firing at the back of an innocent girl with the intention of killing was quite capable of doing to death an old woman whose demise meant a release from poverty and departure from a hated country! "By God! what a blessing old Dick pegged it before these horrors came out!" he said fervently.

"You're right! For she will inevitably be for trial. The Inspector told me about the results of the analysis this morning, with injunctions not to mention it to anyone. But since going to Manana and finding that they all knew, I don't see why you, too, shouldn't be prepared. By the way, that's why the local police didn't come here—too busy over there!"

"They seem to have been pretty thorough!"

"Yes. Things look as black as they can look for that lady . . . and when it comes out in further evidence that it was *her* shot that killed Dick . . . though I doubt whether she meant it for him—now that I hear of her previous 'try' for Miss Lissell (Fenn shuddered, and reached for the whisky). Well! her name will be Mud, as sure as mine *isn't* Jack Robinson!"

Upon which grim conclusion they retired to bed, if not to sleep.

. . . . . .

Inspector Brooke, complete with human airdales, arrived bright and early directly after breakfast. But no Breddon or Castleton put in appearance. Those two seasoned campaigners knew too much, and scenting trouble on the breeze preferred to shelter at the Club till it blew over. The first thing Brooke had to announce to Fenn was that there would be no further pursuit of the shooting affair. That had taken second place to the more serious matter in hand, even had not Yank Breddon's evidence—coinciding perfectly as it did with the statements of everyone else save Mrs. Cardross—definitely settled it once and for all. The present intention was to arrest Mrs. Cardross on the poisoning charge and convey her back to the Dorp.

"For I may tell you," he continued, "that we got hold of the last bit of evidence needed, here, yesterday. When we were in her room we took possession, amongst other things, of a small bottle containing what might be described as distilled essence of *isiBunu* . . . a very stimulating, not to say very fatal concoction. We knew she had it, but we scarcely expected to come by it so easily. Of course she was completely unsuspecting of these developments or the bottle would have been got rid of long ago, or perhaps," the Inspector, after all, being only a Rhodesian under his uniform, grinned heartlessly, "she might have tried it on some of you

people!" Fenn went pale under his tan at the thought of whom it would possibly have been tried on, and how the sun might for him have darkened forever. Instantaneously his thought was to get that loved one away before she witnessed any further scenes of distress. She had, he considered, already suffered enough. He told Brooke so, and was met by the sympathetic proposal that he should invite Felicia to go for a drive with him, and that during their absence the police would endeavour to get the miserable business over, leaving no trace.

"Why not take the little car and run her over to Father Drago's," was Randal's suggestion, and Fenn jumped to it.

"That's an idea," he said, and sitting down at once, embodied it in a note to Felicia.

Neither she nor Stella had put in an appearance for breakfast, which was completely understandable, considering the late hours kept by everybody the night before; also, that for once, each lady had an Abigail to wait upon her, and bring breakfast to her bedroom, a luxury much appreciated in Rhodesia, where, with only "boy" servants, such treats cannot be indulged in, unless a husband (as has been known) turns himself into a maid for the occasion.

However, while Fenn still sat writing his note, enter Miss Twilley with a request from Mrs. Cardross for the use of a car, as she had business to do in the Dorp that morning, and would be much obliged if one could be ready for her at 10.30 promptly. On hearing which Fenn timed his rendezvous with Felicia for 10.15, and sealed up her note. Nurse Twilley, having delivered her message, thought it her further duty to report to the Inspector that Mrs. Cardross had packed up, and evidently intended leaving altogether.

"All to the good, that," commented Brooke, when the nurse was gone. "It will save us a lot of trouble if she pushes off to the Dorp on her own, instead of obliging us to push her!"

The last words sent Fenn damp under the collar again and he jumped up.

"For the Lord's sake, let me get away Miss Lissell first!"

"All right, all right, get your girl away," said Brooke with a broad grin. Fenn scowled, but the Policeman only laughed. "Anyone can see how it is with you, my dear fellow!"

"And if you are a wise fellow, as well as a dear one," Randal murmured mockingly into the irate ear of his friend as he passed, "you'll see that she isn't a *girl* much longer. I know that marriage-in-a-hurry isn't done in the Catholic Church, but Drago is an understanding old bird, and might stretch a point for you, under the peculiar circumstances."

"That's the idea, too, by the living Gad!" said Fenn to himself. It would be wonderful to bring her back here . . . his own! The blood sang in his ears at the very thought. But would old Drago do it? . . . And would she? Well, no harm in trying. "Never be afraid to take opportunity by the beard, nor a woman by the waist," is a proverb all sailors try to live up to. He went and put on his best silk shirt and a red rose in the button-hole of his grey coat.

And when she presently emerged from her little side door, coming out to him, all in white, her shady hat, laden with blue-green roses the colour of her eyes, the face under it more like a Madrigal than ever with its creamy whiteness, its geranium lips shaped like a kiss, he felt a fatalistic certainty that if he put his luck to the test he must win. More than that: as they walked through the garden to the car at the gate she gave a backward look, and a deep sigh:

"Oh, Pat!" she said, "if I have to go away, and leave this place, and you . . . I think I shall die!"

At which his heart leaped up in high certain hope.

. . . . . .

And by the mercy of God that radiant and lovely day of their lives, beginning in Father Drago's little church and

ending under the stars at Poinsettia, was not dimmed by even the shadow of tragedy. Lost in each other, alone with night and the fulfillment of that human dream that reaches out to the infinite, they fortunately knew nothing until later of what had passed after they left.

At 10.30 prompt, Stella had come out to take her seat in the car. The filmy gown of black georgette ordered from the Cape immediately after Countess Karamine's death threw up the intense fairness of her skin, the little primrose rings of her hair, the wistful sadness of the great golden eyes, so that the two policemen lounging in the drive stared and swallowed hard as men will stare and swallow till the crack of doom at sight of a pretty woman. But she cast them a glance of cold dislike, and bowing cursorily to Inspector Brooke, proceeded with the help of Nurse Twilley to stow herself and belongings into the back of the car. Randal, sitting stiffly at the wheel, she took for granted, though it was more or less under duress that he happened to be there acting as chauffeur.

"I am ready now," she said curtly, and immediately he started up, but not before one of the lounging policemen had nipped in next to him, while Inspector Brooke to her evident astonishment opened the door and seated himself at her side. While she stared enquiringly, he mumbled apologies, breaking the news as discreetly as he could that her presence was required at Police Headquarters. So disquietingly fair and fragile was she in her simple costly mourning, with its soft swathy veils floating about her delicate face, and peeping golden hair, that the Inspector found his job neither pleasant nor easy, and when she had assimilated his statement and carelessly assented, his trained instinct told him that *she knew*. But her eyes regarded him without a flicker of apprehension in them.

"A good plucked 'un, by Jove!" was his thought. "What a pity she's a wrong 'un with it!"

Thereafter they talked easily about things in general.

Passing another car with people she knew in it, she waved a greeting. Once or twice she gave her little trilling laugh at some observation of the Inspector's, though almost immediately her face resumed the look of reflective sadness natural to a woman widowed within the week, and left alone to face a callous world. Nearing the Dorp, she asked for a cigarette, but when he produced only Springboks, she shook her head, getting out her own case and offering him one of her special Egyptians. He in turn politely refused, and so she carefully selected one for herself, and put it between her lips. He prepared to light up for her, striking a match and guarding its flame with his two hands, then, suddenly something gave him to pause—perhaps it was the depth she seemed to have put the cigarette into her mouth, fore-shortening it—or the curious sucking sound she made, that arrested his attention, so that his quick glance into her lovely eyes was just in time to catch the spasm of agony that lit them as her face curled and shrivelled like a leaf in flame. Once before he had seen someone—a man—die of cyanide poisoning, and he recognised at once what was happening.

It was a pity, as he remarked afterwards, that Randal had not thought to tell him of that midnight visit to Tagati, and that little sojourn of hers in the Mine-head office, where the cupboard containing the cyanide was kept. He would have recognised at once that it was not sleeping *cachets* she had gone after, but cyanide! Cyanide, to keep by her in case of need—just *in case* of her suspicion being true that the little bottle gone from her room had been taken not *quite* accidently by the police. So simple to insert a tiny lump into one of her cigarettes!

Yes, it was a pity for Inspector Brooke. It would have made all the difference to his record as a shrewd and experienced officer. Yet, strangely enough, he was not altogether sorry that he had not known in time to prevent that swift, terrible passing of hers.

Certainly she was a wrong 'un . . . wrong as they make

'em! But remembering the eyes of her, the trilling laugh and slim white throat, he reflected that any other ending for her would have been unthinkable. In which conclusion the rest of Rhodesia, breathing a great sigh of relief, cordially agreed.

THE END

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